

MOON OF TWELVE GODS By ROBERT ARNETTE

PICTURE 25

25¢

AMAZING STORIES



"Did this madman's
mistake lie in his
effort to destroy
TOO MANY WOMEN?"

TOO MANY WOMEN?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

THE BEHIND- THE-SCENES



WORLD PERSPECTIVE

MT power. I exhibited my device at the age of 14 years. New York techniques date and power for our a confirmation of

I sold my first drawings to ZEN-DARK sometime around 1938, at about the same time I was working for Popular Publications and Standard Magazine. I've illustrated and painted jackets for dozens of books, and particularly like to illustrate—

THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY

THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

Many people are not used to

One of the most important features of our system of government is the right of the people to petition the government for a redress of grievances. This right is guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution, which states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

We find human life saved more and more, increasing in number, in the statistics across the face of the continent, but that only a small majority of this greater human race is saved, leaving three out of ten.

With total cost being particularly sensitive to
the cost of capital, only the long term
rate of interest can be of much.

We tried of great technological progress, we have no way of reducing and reducing areas so that the energy is not. We have yet to develop a method of reducing heat from the inside of the oil.

He also sometimes walked in the woods until he was too tired to stand up on the top of Mount Everett.

And we always dream about what will be.

other plants? The only way to find out is to do a controlled experiment.

1000 1990

1860-1861. 1862-1863. 1864-1865. 1866-1867.

1996, *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 91, 1227-1237.

He was a man of great natural ability, and a good teacher. He was a man of great natural ability, and a good teacher. He was a man of great natural ability, and a good teacher.

I am very glad that you all the winter are
indulging in the sports like a good country
boy. I am sure you are getting a good education
in the country. I have no need to tell you
how good a place it is to get a good education and
make a good man.

... and Christopher is tell that a man
more qualified. Senator Ladd, Vice
President Farley, Senator Keybrough
and thousands of others is not worthy.

By all means my school library is often a quiet place to go to.

And the statement that we expect to be the top of Japan's business this year is the manufacturing side looks like we have taken out a year to get to the

2. In odd-numbered groups in the office, speak as soon as possible.

and the present is exhibited among us the Big Creek Pequings. Consider as the 20th, 21st, 22d, 23d, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32d, 33d, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42d, 43d, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52d, 53d, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62d, 63d, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72d, 73d, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82d, 83d, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92d, 93d, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102d, 103d, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111st, 112d, 113d, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122d, 123d, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132d, 133d, 134th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142d, 143d, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152d, 153d, 154th, 155th, 156th, 157th, 158th, 159th, 160th, 161st, 162d, 163d, 164th, 165th, 166th, 167th, 168th, 169th, 170th, 171st, 172d, 173d, 174th, 175th, 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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

MANY readers are disturbed, and rightly so, because most editors present only one side of whatever subject they editorialize upon. Because I don't sleep very well when half of our readers are mad at me, I have decided to present both sides of the subject I plan to write about—said subject being: GRANTED IT IS MECHANICALLY POSSIBLE, SHOULD WE COLONIZE OTHER PLANETS?

I say NO—for the following sound and valid reasons:

OUR right to move onto new planets can spring only from the job we have done upon this one, and I submit that our score here can be symbolized only by a big fat zero. During the untold ages of our continued tenure, we toke up progress as of 1952 and find: Half the population of the world underfed. More than half reclining under the heels of dictators. We find suspicions, hatreds, fears and animosities permeating the atmosphere, from pole to pole.

We find human life rated as the cheapest commodity in existence—an average of intelligence across the face of the earth so abysmally low that only a startling minority of this globe's tenants are capable of writing their own names.

WE find our best technical minds dedicated almost solely to the business of creating instruments of death.

We boast of great technological progress, yet we have no way of watering vast soil-rich desert areas so that the hungry may eat. We have yet to devise a workable method of removing salt from the waters of the sea.

We rate ourselves mighty in many ways. Yet we are too puny to exist even on the top of Mount Everest.

And we should dream about colonizing

other planets? We should expand the sphere of our "culture"? Better that somebody from outer space should colonize us.

I SAY YES, we should colonize other planets for the following good and valid reasons:

We have beyond all doubt done an excellent job on the planet we now inhabit. In this year 1952, we can look back on world history and say authoritatively that more humans are well fed than at any time in previous history. Half the world population is under the sway of tyranny—but not too long ago, as historical time is measured, *all* the world's human tenants functioned under absolute rulers. Therefore, tremendous progress has been made.

The majority of our best technical minds are *not* engaged in forming the weapons of war. They have to their credit the automobile, the airplane, iceless refrigeration, the miracle drugs and other boons to mankind too numerous to list.

IT is true that many of the world's inhabitants cannot write their own names, but far more of them cannot understand the theories of Einstein and other great scientists who are also citizens of this planet.

Is it not shortsighted to say that a race which produced Abraham Lincoln, George Washington Carver, Florence Nightingale and thousands of others is not worthy of expansion?

By all means we should advance to other planets as soon as possible.

And the statement that we cannot live on the top of Everest is untrue. We could exist on this mountaintop very nicely—if we could figure out a way to get up there.

We should certainly advance to the other planets as soon as possible. H.R.

AMAZING

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All STORIES Complete

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They tell you there is only one world in which we live and die. But are they right? Maybe there are many worlds. And maybe we live in all of them

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There has been a lot of controversy through the years about the "live ball" in baseball. But take it from us, the fans "ain't seen nothing" yet

MOON OF TWELVE GODS (Short—9,000) by Robert Arnette 66

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Street cars run on rails, so they usually get where they are supposed to go. But not this one. And the customers couldn't even get a refund!

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He was a good boy, on the way up, and before the fight, he grinned and said, "I'll kill him." And he did! But only to meet him later in a bar!

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Hilter maintained that if you control the children you control the nation. The space invaders went further. All they wanted was control of the babies!

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What was the secret of the golden knife? Dain wanted to know, but it was guarded by everyone — including the mummies in the museum using clubs!

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TOO MANY WORLDS

By Gerald Vance



The creature was not from any world they knew

ROGER SHERMAN was vehement in his reply: "No! I am not speaking of dual personalities! I am speaking of separate and distinct existence in the same plane and in the same time. Understand?"

Wayne Kenrick shrugged and grinned at the tall, lanky man standing before him. There was something

Lincolnesque about Sherman. Perhaps it was his large nose, perhaps his ganging length, always a little off balance. But Kenrick was always reminded of the famous President whenever he saw Sherman.

"Tell me, Lydia," he said turning to the woman sitting in a wingback chair, "how do you quiet this mon-



They invited Ken up to their private room. Ken accepted. But he didn't know it was the kind of room that went places!

stosity you call your husband?"

Sherman smiled suddenly. "Blast you, Wayne! You get me off on a tangent with your silly questions, then I want to make sense of something and you give me one of your goofy grins. If you don't want to hear what Lydia and I are planning—"

"Lydia!" Kenrick said. "You're not going along on this insane Buck Rogers goose chase of yours?"

"Oh, come now, Wayne! You know

yourself that Lydia's perfectly...."

"Nuts! Lydia's perfectly capable and all that but this, this, look! Tell me. How is it that a man like Roger Sherman who has contributed so much to the world of science, who has invented some of the most noteworthy functional items of common use, can become involved in something as utterly fantastic as this? And, to top it off, make certain his wife becomes party to it?"

"What you say about the project's being fantastic is quite true. But many things fantastic became commonplace. I don't think I have to go beyond naming the telephone and television as among the best-known. The plans for the machine I had in mind were drawn long ago; the machine itself is almost ready. Lydia and I are prepared. We need but one *thing*. Wayne Kenrick—"

"And I refuse! They say Wayne Kenrick's a little slappy about going off on his screwy projects, but let me tell you, Roger. It would take a whole team of Missouri mules to drag me off on this. And then I would have to be tied hand foot and mouth before they could get me."

"Wayne," Lydia's gentle voice broke into the talk. "Roger would be as lost as a kid without a sled in a snow bank, if you didn't come. You know it. But aside from the personal things involved, Roger has a feeling that something incredible and perhaps of great value to mankind can be found in this world which we plan on finding. And once more," she smiled with mischievous indulgence, "we come back to the personal touch. Roger has always had you either at his side or within calling distance whenever he has had one of these brainstorms and has gone into it. Let's not make an exception of this."

"So it's got be a 'one for all

and all for one' sort of thing, eh?" Kenrick asked. "Okay! Let's have a little background, please. Lydia, some mood-music, please. All right, Roger. Begin—"

"I WON'T go into the pseudo-scientific details," Sherman said. "Lord knows that sometimes even I don't know what's truth and what's hypothesis. But many men of fame and knowledge have leaned toward the theory that there are existences on the same plane and at the same time. Call it fourth dimension, call it what you will. McNamara, Steiber, J. J. Priestly, Haller, to name a few, have written their theories on the matter. Unfortunately, not a single one of these has had the practical means of attaining his goal. I am the most fortunate, because, as you say, I *am* a man of inventive genius.

"The machine is ready. It but needs occupants—"

"So the occupants are ready also," Kenrick said. "When do we start? What do we take along? Hey! I've got the sharpest sarong-trunks as ever came off a Sulka counter. Praise the Lord and pass the women! Wayne Kenrick's gonna be on the loose. My only fear is that the women we find on this now-we're-here, now-we're-not-plane may be two-headed or four-armed. Say it won't be so, Roger—"

Roger stepped to the chair in which his wife was seated and made room for himself on one of the wings. His long, angular face was wreathed in smiles as he bent a heavy-browed look on his friend.

"Well, Wayne. I can't promise any women for you. Nor can I say what their appearance may be. But never let it be said that Wayne Kenrick didn't take a chance. Right, fella?"

"Right," said Kenrick a bit wearily. "Maybe Kenrick will find *the* woman

he's looked for in this place...."

Lydia's eyes and lips mirrored understanding. She had known for a long while that the only thing that ailed Wayne Kenrick was the lack of a woman, the *right* kind. Kenrick was a lonely man, despite the many things he possessed, including good looks and money and position.

"If you wouldn't search so hard, Wayne," she said, "perhaps the right woman would be there...."

Wayne's head went up and down twice, as is if in agreement. Then the wide smile broke again on his lips and he heaved himself erect. "Guess it's time I went beddy-bed. Or a reasonable facsimile. Roger. Let me know when we leave and I'll make arrangements for it. Night, folks—"

Wayne Kenrick had walked entirely around the Sherman house. And had come again to the front entrance. His face bore an expression of bewilderment. Where in the devil was Roger keeping the gimmick that was to take them on their travels, he wondered. He remembered the garage and the dawn broke for him.

He used the knocker and grinned down at Lydia, who came to its summons.

"Right on time," he said. "And hungry as only a Kenrick can be. What's on the fire, lady?"

"Hot cakes, ham, eggs and coffee," she said. "Roger has been chewing his nails the past half hour waiting for you."

"Greetings, Roger, m'lad. Heave to, m'hearty. Mizzen the mast and starboard to port and all that triviality. What's with the time machine? Let's throw out the anchor and away, men...."

"Sit your squat shape and have breakfast, Wayne," Roger said dourly. "Aren't you ever on time? Lydia's the smartest woman in the world. I swear

it. She said you'd be an hour late. But a man's gut doesn't know about these things. I'm hungry. Let's eat."

THEIR TALK was light and the woman was a splendid counterfoil for them. Kenrick stayed away from the subject that was closest to his mind until it was impossible for him to keep still any longer.

"All right! I give up. Where did you put it?"

"Put what?" Roger asked.

"The machine. The vehicle what's going to take us places and not move at all."

"Now if your cerebration process was working," Roger Sherman said, "you would have known that whatever machine had to be constructed would not be made anywhere but in this house. Of course there is no machine. Matter of fact we're in it right now. Use your eyes, Wayne. Look around...."

"Well, I'll be.... Imagine that! I'll bet I've been in this room a hundred times, and this is the first time I've noticed that door. When did you put it on?" Wayne asked.

"Only the door, Wayne?" Roger asked. "But what's the use? I'd just have to ask about each item separately. This entire room has been fitted for our travels. This *room* is the machine."

Then it was that Wayne really noticed how many things had been added. There were many things, however, he did not see. Roger kept quiet, knowing that it would be a waste of his time trying to make clear what he had constructed. He rose and excused himself, saying:

"I'll be back in a moment, Wayne. Have some more coffee. And pour some for me, please, Lydia."

LYDIA SHERMAN made light conversation as she poured the cof-

fee and helped herself to some more hot cakes. An amused light gleamed in her eyes as she noticed Wayne's startled looks as a loud humming began in the room, and a shimmering haze settled over the windows. She was but waiting for the man opposite to notice it. He did just as Roger Sherman entered the room again.

"Hey! What's that?" Wayne asked, gesturing with thumb toward the windows.

"We're off!" Roger exclaimed brightly. "Us and our little room. To the greatest adventure of our lives. Didn't think it would be this way, did you, Wayne?"

"You mean I can finish my breakfast?" Wayne asked.

"Yes. I've set it for ten minutes. Experiments have proved that we enter the world of dual-existance in about seven minutes. Lydia and I tried it the other day. We didn't go all out, however. Now if you don't mind, I'd better keep an eye on the gauges. Don't want to get us out of the world completely."

Wayne watched him idly and speculated on the world of another plane they were about to enter. The whole thing smelled of witchcraft to him, still. But Roger Sherman was too practical a person to be misled by something which did not have a basis in factual theory for him. It was just curiosity. Wayne smiled cheerily at the woman across from him at the table and waited for Roger to get done with his tinkering at the gauges.

Sherman was looking at his wrist watch as he returned. He gave his wife a quick look, shook his head and said:

"Guess we'd better get our stuff together, Lydia. Will you see to it our guest and fellow explorer into the unknown is properly armed?"

The woman got up, stepped to a

locker which had been built under the window and opened it. She took out a rifle, two belts of cartridges and a pistol. These she handed to Wayne, who had moved to her side. Then she did the same for her husband, and finally for herself. Quite suddenly the air was filled with the spark of tension. The features of the three were no longer carefree and smiling. Each was slightly grim, and even the woman was not her usual calm self. Once more Sherman looked at his watch.

"This is it!" he said, and his voice was a little pinched.

The humming sound had stopped.

THE LIGHT was pallid, as if tired. A dying sun rode overhead. The lead rider threw up a hand and the other eight gathered around him. He shaded his eyes with his hand, looked down toward the spot in the near distance where he had seen the three figures, and turned to his nearest companion and said:

"Do you see them, too, Muhan?"

The thick-set man astride the strange beast nodded soberly.

"They lie still. Shall we risk it...?"

"It makes little difference. This is desert country. There can be but small surprise."

"Very well, Muhan. Take five of the men and investigate. The rest of us will keep watch."

Wayne Kenrick tried to open his eyes but somehow they seemed not to want to. He knew he was alive, but it was as if he were in some sort of lethargic state. His muscles responded to the urgings of his nerve centers but weakly. Then he became aware of the swishing sounds of feet moving about him. Once more he tried to open his lids and this time with success.

Stooped over the inert figure of Roger Sherman was a strange human being. It was the figure of a man, but a man who was at least eight feet tall, of an odd blue coloring, a man who wore leather harness about his middle and a man who was armed with a long sword. The sword was in the stranger's left hand. The right hand was busy fingering the rifle which lay at Sherman's side.

Wayne thought back to that instant when the humming sound stopped. The three of them had been looking at each other by turn, as if conscious that something of vast importance was about to take place. What followed was simultaneous with all. It was as if some great weight had been exerted against them, as if they were being pulled and pushed at the same time in different directions by a force that was beyond their control.

Wayne tried to reach out toward Lydia; he saw Roger had the same idea. He saw also the look of fear in the woman's eyes. He tried to frame words of courage but not a sound stirred from him. It was becoming more and more difficult to breathe. His chest was being compressed until the pressure and pain were becoming unbearable....

Then darkness fell across his eyes....

And now he was awake and alive. But where? And who were these strange beings? What did they want? Were they friendly? Roger... Lydia... They had to be alive; they had to be warned!

His fingers felt for the pistol in the holster. Aah! He had it! Now. Gently, easily.... He grinned grimly. The gun was in his hand. Now get to your feet, Wayne. But carefully, without noise. Mustn't disturb this blue character....

He was erect swiftly, in a crouch,

his mouth opened to call warning, and arms grabbed him about his waist, and other arms came heavily around his throat.

But Wayne Kenrick was no lightweight, no fop. His two hundred pounds were bone and muscle. He had always been in trim; handball, tennis and swimming had all contributed to making him lithe. More, he had been endowed with a strength which was almost superhuman.

HE MOVED now with lightning speed. He ducked downward and at the same time chopped backward with the sides of his palms at the wrists so close to his sides. The man behind went sailing over Kenrick's head, as if shot from a bow. The one who had attempted to grab his waist let out a howl of pain and let his hands fall to his sides.

But immediately the other four rushed toward Wayne Kenrick. And this time they came with the swords thrust out, aimed for his body.

"Come on you blue goons!" Wayne shouted, glorying in the fight which had been thrust on him. "This baby'll take care of you...."

"Hold it, Wayne!" came the shouted words from where Roger Sherman lay face down on the dun-colored earth. "Don't shoot!"

The five figures stopped their movements at the words.

"Why not?" Wayne bellowed. "These guys want to play rough. So let's show them how."

"No," Roger said as he got to his feet and stepped to Lydia's side and helped her up. The man who had been kneeling at Roger's side moved away from the others who had been about to rush Wayne, and came forward. Now his sword was tipped downward, the point almost touching the ground.

"No," Roger said again as he held up a hand, palm outward, in a sign of peace.

Wayne made a face but holstered the pistol and walked slowly toward the group now collected about Roger and his wife. He was able to make out the features of these blue-colored people more clearly now. Other than their coloring they seemed not different from himself, he realized. Certainly they had the requisite number of arms, legs, eyes, ears and other normal appendages. But they were big guys, he thought as he took his stand beside his friends. And those stickers they carried could do a lot of damage.

"Who are you?"

Wayne thought it was a silly question. These people couldn't understand English. Possibly they used sign language.

"We are from Wahoon," came the astonishing answer. The spokesman was an exceptionally well-muscled being, slightly taller than his fellows. "Who are you? And from whence come you?"

"Check," Wayne said. "Now we're back where we started from, wherever that may be. So give Tarzan an answer."

"We are people from another world," Roger replied. "Do you have a chief? A city or place to which we can be taken?"

The six of them conferred for a moment in low tones and in a language which was certainly not English. Finally the tallest of them, the one who was evidently their leader, said:

"Aye. We have a chief. But we cannot take you to him. Later, perhaps, but not now. Now we will take you to Rebak, our under-chief. He will want to see you."

"Zwieback, eh?" Wayne said in aside to Roger. "Interesting. Now the

question is, will we want to see him?"

"Wayne," Lydia called to him an instant later as they started for the crest of a small hill.

He dropped behind and came closer to her, slowing down his pace to the smaller steps she took. "Yeah?"

"Please, Wayne. Easy on the comedy. These people seem primitive. Roger and I have had dealings with peoples like these before. It's a funny thing, but the formal manner is second nature to them. Be pleasant, will you Wayne?"

"I'll even be courtly, Lydia, if you ask it," Wayne grinned down at her.

SHE ANSWERED his smile and said, "Let's hurry it up, Wayne. We're a bit behind the rest."

Roger and the leader of the blue men were waiting for them on the crest of the hill. In fact Roger ran down a few steps to warn them.

"They are waiting for their companions. Muhan—he's the head man here—thinks that Rebak has spotted the enemy, whoever they may be, and is riding to warn them. So stay down close to the ground."

Rebak leaped from the six-legged *meena* and fell among them. Wayne looked at him in surprise. Rebak was not as tall as Muhan. Nor was he well-formed. But there was something alive, something vital about the man. His voice was brisk, authoritative, as he shot words at Muhan. They talked back and forth for a moment or so. Finally Rebak shook his head as if satisfied with what Muhan was saying. He turned to Roger and said:

"Muhan tells me you came in peace. Welcome, stranger from another world, and peace go with you. Unfortunately what you have asked for cannot be readily granted. We are a long way from our homes. And if what I spotted is so we may never see them."

There are only nine of us. There were fuily a hundred of the enemy."

"Is it that bad?" Wayne asked.

Rebak turned his sharp glance toward the other. "Muhan tells me you have the strength of ten men. Anyone who could toss Lobar as you did, well, I am only sorry I was not there to see it."

"Maybe I'll give you the chance some day," Wayne said. "But you haven't answered my question."

Rebak grinned and Wayne felt surprise that the man's teeth were white. Somehow he had the feeling they would be a deep yellow. "Is it bad? It isn't particularly good. They will not be over friendly. Certainly I could desire a situation less fraught with danger."

Wayne felt a stirring of admiration for the man. He spoke forthrightly.

"Of course you could bring us back to the spot where you found us and everything would come out even then," Wayne said. "No responsibility, no worry."

"Now just a minute, Wayne..." Roger broke in.

"I don't give a hang," Wayne said looking queerly at the other. "It's Lydia I'm thinking of. She shouldn't share our danger. Or will I be hitting the ball on the nose when I presume you can't get back to where we came from?"

"Well, Wayne," Roger said hesitantly, "we can. But we have to wait until the times coincide."

"So when does that happen?"

"In twenty-four hours."

"Nice going, lad. Looks like we'll have to show these guys a thing or three. You were pretty good with a shootin' iron, podner. Maybe we can stand the bad Injuns off for twenty-four hours. Call out the troops, men. The pioneers are a goin' to fight it out. Give me my geetar and my trusty

Long Tom and Ahm ready."

The bewilderment on Rebak's face was a joy to behold. Lydia hid a grin as she watched the blue man look from one to another of the two. She could almost read his mind. Were they insane, was what he was thinking. What sort of madmen were they?

"Rebak," Roger turned to the other. "We have weapons which will be of great value. Now where we are lying at this moment would be an excellent place for an ambush. My friend, my wife and myself will lie here and wait the coming of the enemy. You and the rest make yourselves conspicuous so that they will ride boldly at you. Do I make myself clear?"

"**I**F THESE weapons are so powerful why did you not pick them off when first we saw them?" Rebak asked shrewdly.

"I could not take the chance," Roger replied. "Had I missed a single one the others would have taken alarm and fled. But they would not have gone far. And when they returned they would have been more wary, less susceptible to surprise."

The answer satisfied Rebak completely. He shook his head several times, patted Roger's shoulder and crawled off to his friends. A moment or two later the three saw the nine of them crawling along the shallow flank of the hill in the direction in which the enemy would be coming. Rebak was going to make sure the enemy was going to come directly into the trap.

The moments went by on leaden wings. And though they kept their eyes strained for a sight of the large group they had seen on the crest of a higher hill in the distance it was as if the dun-colored earth had swallowed them.

"Funny-looking critters they're rid-

ing," Wayne observed somewhat wryly.

"And I suppose a horse would look very odd to them," Roger said.

"So'd we, for that matter," Lydia said. "When they have more time they will discuss our pigmentation as we discuss theirs and wonder what sort of world we come from."

"One question before the ball begins, maestro. Who taught them English?"

"I don't know," Roger replied. "All I can do is guess. And my guess is as good as yours. I say it's done with mind-pictures. They receive an image of the words we use before we use them and by some means those pictures are translated into spoken words. English words, naturally."

"Then why don't we get the word-pictures of their language?" Wayne pried at the other.

"How the devil do I know?" Roger asked irritably.

"Fine scientist," Wayne said. "Ask him a question and what do I get? Another question. Hey! Looks like the ball's about to begin. Our friends have arrived."

They understood then why they hadn't seen them. The strangers were mounted on the six-legged beasts, who were colored to blend with the earth. And the mounted men had been riding low in their saddles so as to show as little of their own coloring as possible.

"Wait till they get pretty close," Roger said in low-voiced warning. "We can't afford to miss too many shots."

But Wayne was already taking aim. He held his fire until the nearest was about a hundred yards distant. Then he let loose four shots. Four men fell from the saddles. And immediately following came the fire from the rifles of Roger and Lydia Sherman. A dozen men were knocked from their mounts by their accurate shooting.

Now Wayne and the others fired slowly and carefully. For with the first strange and fearsome sound the mounted men scattered and came forward singly. Wayne fired until the only answer to the squeeze of his fingers was a clicking sound. Muttering an imprecation Wayne hurled the rifle from his in disgust and pulled the pistol from the holster. Rising, he stepped forward a pace or two in advance of the others and waited his chance. There wasn't going to be any missing as far as he was concerned.

A VERITABLE giant of a man came riding as if from the bowels of the earth, straight at him, a gigantic sword swinging around the shaven head as if it were a windmill. Wayne had time only to observe that the man was not blue, as were Rebak and Muhan, but a deep purple. Then the other was on him and the huge sword was winging toward Wayne's head.

Wayne ducked swiftly under the blow, aimed upward and fired. Not even a click echoed the pull of his finger. Once more Wayne pulled at the trigger. Then as the mounted man came forward again, after recovering from the missed blow, Wayne hurled the pistol straight into the huge purple face.

It struck with a satisfying thud and on the instant a stream of blood streamed from the man's nose and mouth. Then there was no time to observe more. For Wayne was leaping straight up at the man, one hand out-thrust for the throat, the other for the bridle.

The meena squealed in anger as the white man's hand gripped the bridle. And echoing the scream was the sound of its master's voice raised in a bellow of anger as Wayne's heavy hand gripped his own wrist. The purple one tried to stab with the sword but Wayne was too close. A

second later they were rolling on the ground.

From somewhere in the distance Wayne could hear the sharp metallic sound of a pistol's fire. And close at hand men cursed, or so it seemed. But all that was in the background. Wayne had tried for the thick throat but had come in too low. The wrist was good enough. Wayne only wanted to unseat the other.

But now that he had succeeded he wondered why he had gone to all the trouble. This character was as hard to handle as a grizzly. To begin with his strength was colossal and his weight and size made him hard to handle from a fighter's point of view. Wayne wrestled the big man erect and stepped away, shooting straight rights and lefts to the purple one's jaw. Without effect. They didn't even stagger the big goon. But they did keep him off balance and make it impossible for him to use the long sword he was so anxious to spit Wayne on.

Then Wayne got the bright idea of shifting his range to the lower regions and that payed off. This time Wayne hooked with both hands and shifted in a pivot, bringing every ounce of his weight into the blows. From the first the purple giant showed he didn't like the new tactics. And after Wayne had thrown a half dozen blows the big man started to back away.

"Come on. Drop!" Wayne grunted after putting all his power in a punch which sank a full ten inches into the other's belly..

The other grunted sickly after the blow and folded both hands across his belly and bent double. Then Wayne took quick aim and shot the heaviest punch he had thrown during the fight, an uppercut to the button.

There was no question about that punch. The big man went staggering backward a half dozen steps, then fell

flat on his face. But Wayne had not the time for self-congratulation. The fight was over for this guy but there were others. He stooped, swept the long sword up and whirled. Just in time to meet another of the purple giants coming in.

At sight of the sword in Wayne's hand, the other stopped his headlong rush and came in more warily, the blade glinting in the weak sunlight. Wayne grinned emptily and thrust his blade out in a slow straight feint. The other's wide, flat face opened in a grin of delight as he parried the blow and came in along the blade's edge. But the grin was of short duration. Wayne's arm suddenly turned steel; with an indescribably dexterous twist of his wrist Wayne disarmed the other.

FOR A LONG second the two men stared at each other. Then Wayne said:

"Pick it up, Jack. I don't like to fight guys who can't fight back."

It was as if the other could not believe his ears. He stared first at Wayne, then at the sword lying at his feet, then back to Wayne. Tiring of it Wayne turned his back and leaped toward a group who were facing Roger. And just in time, for it was obvious Roger was about to get his throat cut or stomach slit.

Roger Sherman had also fired his rifle until it had clicked emptily. And like Wayne, had realized he would have no time to refill from his cartridge belts. They had all underestimated the terrific speed of the meenas. Throwing a hurried glance over his shoulder to see how Lydia was faring, Roger got to his feet and awaited the coming of the purple men. Lydia was all right and had been the only one of the three who had the foresight to unsling her cartridge belts before beginning to fire.

There were a full dozen of them coming at him. Taking careful aim Roger began a systematic firing until the last cartridge was spent.

"....I'll cover," Lydia called. But even as she shouted to her husband a threat she had not seen materialized. The hideous beasts came leaping from all sides, and men jumped from low flat saddles and fell on her.

But Roger was too busy himself to see what had happened to Lydia. He had taken care of six of them but the others were now on him. His face was set and grim and somewhat hopeless. For Roger knew that the time had come for him, as it does for all men.

Yet, though he felt such was the case, he did not intend to simply lie down and let these hideous beings run over him. The first to reach him dove from the saddle straight at him. It was amazing that a creature of such size and weight could act with such speed. But though the purple man was swift, he was not so swift as Roger.

Stepping aside with a lithe movement Roger let the other hit the ground, and drove the barrel of the empty pistol along the skull of the second, who had stooped low to drive his sword home. But that was all the time he had of his own choice. And it was then that Wayne Kenrick got to him....

WAYNE KENRICK forgot all thoughts of fair play and sportsmanship. There was no time to tap a man on the shoulder and say, "Look, old man. Mind if we do this mazurka together?" His borrowed weapon went all the way through the man who was facing Roger. Blood spouted from the ripped back and covered Wayne from head to toe. He jerked the sword loose and went for the next man. And in so doing saw Lydia on the ground,

struggling futilely against a half dozen men who were ripping at her clothes in a frenzy of excitement.

His voice rose in a scream of rage as he leaped in among them. He was lightning itself, so swift was he, and like an avenging being he ripped and tore at them until the two who were left when he was done fled from him. Lydia's clothes were ripped almost completely from her. Her bare breast heaved in terrified play, but her eyes were unafraid as they searched for her husband. She screamed suddenly and Wayne turned to see one of the purple men stand on tip toe, his sword held high above his head by both hands, and plunge the sword downward toward the figure of Roger Sherman lying prone.

It was a flash of lightning, a flying spear of steel, a bolt from the blue which struck the swordsman and pierced him through. The long blade fell from suddenly nerveless fingers and the huge figure fell straight down on the very man the giant had been about to transfix.

"....Ho, men!" a voice that was stentorian suddenly broke into the clamor of battle. "Take them alive... Alive!"

Wayne turned for an instant toward the spot from which the great voice had come. His mouth hung open at sight of the man. The giant was a full twelve feet in height and must have weighed in the neighborhood of five hundred pounds. Then something struck Wayne Kenrick a blow at the base of the neck and he fell into a pool of lurky darkness which swarmed with gyrating lights....

"**B**RING the large one here," a voice commanded.

Those were the first words Wayne heard. He opened his eyes and pain swept a scarlet haze in front of his

eyes. The second time he opened them they stayed open.

He was being carried by four of the purple giants. Darkness was falling and an immense moon filled the sky. Four huge fires burned at the four points of the compass, about a hundred yards removed from each other. He did not want to stir because the slightest movement shot the pain across the back of his head. Whoever had hit him could hit with the power of a pile driver.

But Wayne had recognized the voice. It belonged to the immense creature.

"His eyes are open," the giant said. "Put him on the ground. Now, stranger. We can be comfortable while we talk. Or would you rather remain silent?"

"Who wants to be quiet?" Wayne asked. "Me, I love talking. Especially at the wrong time. Like when Roger Sherman invites me to go into the fourth dimension with him. What do you want to know?"

Wayne's voice was unconcerned, gay. But his eyes were both wary and worried. He saw the figures of Lydia and Sherman. Lydia had the remnants of her shirt pulled close to her nakedness. Roger Sherman lay close to her side. Both were still.

The giant seemed unaware of Wayne's wandering glance. He was seated on the ground, a number of his followers grouped closely around him. They were intent on Wayne.

"Your friends are all right," the giant said. "We had to handle the man roughly; he had an idea we intended harm to the woman. Do not trouble yourself about them. Now. You were about to say who you were and what you were doing here...."

"Well, you can believe this or not but we were just waiting for a street

car," Wayne said. "Mister, even if I explained in detail I don't think you would understand. We are from another world, a world that is, well, did you ever look into a mirror...? Nah! What the heck do you know about mirrors? You see how hard it is for me to explain. I'll tell you what. Roger there can do a better job than I can. Soon as he comes to ask him."

"These garments you wear, the spitting-fire sticks, this strange tongue you speak in; they are from another world. For surely Nogab has seen all of Wahoos and never have his eyes seen or his ears heard what they have this day. My people will think me the greatest warlord on all Wahoos when I bring you to my city."

"Gee! That's darn nice of you," Wayne said brightly. "But I don't think we can make it. We've got other plans."

NOGAB unfolded his large length and stepped to Wayne's side. He reached down and lifted the other to his feet. It was as if he had reached for a child, so easily did Wayne come upward.

"I saw some of your feats, stranger," Nogab said. "You have no size, but your courage is great. We admire and respect courage on Wahoos. Do not be a fool. Better to be an unwilling guest than a prisoner."

"The man is quite right, Wayne," Roger spoke from the shadows beyond the fire. "He seems to be a decent sort. Mind if I join you? Lydia seems to be asleep."

"Aah! Your friend has recovered. Good! Now we can talk...."

"What you have told me is beyond belief," Nogab said after Roger had explained as best he could what had happened to them. "I do not understand fully, but I am only a warrior.

The men of learning will know what you speak of. Yet I know what you have spoken of has been the truth. You have been fortunate. Nogab is not a barbarian. He merely loves war. You have the choice of coming with me or remaining here. I do not have food to leave, and very soon the night will be on us in full. And after, the day. I do not relish being alone here...."

Wayne and Roger looked at each other and shook their heads in silent agreement.

"Fair enough, Nogab," Roger said. "We sleep the night out, is that right?"

"Yes. But we will be away before the dawn."

The two arose and left Nogab seated where he had fallen on Roger's arrival. They strolled back to Lydia, who awaited them wide-eyed with suspense, wondering what the confab had been about, yet loath to ask for fear of what the answer might be.

The three discussed their problems until the glow of the four fires was but ember-scarlet. And when they were through talking they were certain of one thing. They had been very unlucky in choosing a time and place for their travel.

As Roger put it: "....We have but twenty-four hours in which to return. On the time experiment with a guinea pig the physical animal disintegrated after that period of time. You see, Wayne, we are in two places at the same time. It was merely a matter of finding the exact wave which would establish rapport between this world and the one we know. After that I had but to tune in our physical selves to that wave and we were here. Now those waves are in effect only at that spot in which we materialized. So our problem is quite simple. We must get back to the spot on which we arrived

and in the time allotted to us. Simple?"

"Oh sure," Wayne dismissed the problem with an airy gesture. "And if we don't?"

"Then we dematerialize there, and remain here."

"Forever, I assume?"

"Yes." The reply was without equivocation.

"How nice. Shall we sleep on it? We've had a busy day, I say."

"Might as well," Lydia said wearily. "I don't know about you two, but this bloodletting has got me a little down."

"Just one more question. Suppose one of us dies while we are still here? What happens to us there?"

"I don't know," Roger said, his brows corrugating in sudden thought. "I don't know...."

"Oh, well. Let's not get morbid now, Kenrick," Wayne said. "The answer can wait another day."

LYDIA felt a hand at her shoulder and sat erect, startled and frightened.

"Just me, dear," her husband reassured her. "I think we're about to start."

She saw and felt the movement of men and beasts. The blackness was melting into grey and after she had stopped shivering, she noticed that small cooking fires had been built. Wayne Kenrick was standing close to one of the fires and, on seeing that she and Roger were awake, motioned for them to come over.

"I don't know what these laddies are cooking but it smells good. Wonder if they'll invite us to dine?"

"Yes," came the bull-throated answer to his question. "A full belly is needed on this journey. It will be done soon."

Nogab had come up behind them.

Wayne was amazed that a man of such size could move so softly and easily.

"Well," Lydia said. "I don't know about you men but this gal is starved. After all we haven't eaten since yesterday breakfast...." her words petered off suddenly.

She realized something was wrong. The time element was all out of kilter. It had been from the very beginning. The sun had been quite high when they had recovered consciousness the first time. And yet the night had come swiftly. Too swiftly.

"—Roger! What time do you have?"

He looked at his wrist watch. A startled and unbelieving look came to his eyes. He had a watch which showed the seconds, minutes, hours, days and months. He kept opening and closing his mouth but nothing came out.

"What's wrong, fella?" Wayne asked.

"I'm not sure. But there was one thing we should have done. Put a watch on the guinea pig. My watch says we've been here three weeks."

"Ha-ha! Always clowning. That's Roger," Wayne said in hollow tones. "Just a gag-man at heart. You're not serious?"

"As death," Roger replied. "But I think, however, that my watch has gone haywire. Look at yours. What time do you have?"

"Eleven," Wayne announced.

"Mine says four thirty," Roger said. "Yet neither is right obviously."

"Y'know," Lydia broke in. "Men always say women can't think in a straight line. Well, here's a woman who thinks the same of men. I'm always surprised, especially when I hear my husband who prides himself so much on being a rational being, a

person who uses his brain to the fullest, talk in circles when what should be of prime importance, escapes him.

"Look! Men have been killed by you and Wayne. Yet Nogab has not said a word about it. What happened to those blue men? These are important questions."

"You see, Roger," Wayne said ironically. "I've always said Lydia married the wrong man. Now why can't you be like me?"

"Pfah! An animated joke," Roger growled. But it was evident Lydia's words rankled. He felt she was quite right. They were forgetting the important things. At least he was. "True, Lydia. All that you have said. But if Nogab has said nothing, I, for one, do not intend to remind him. As for the blue men, they escaped, no doubt. Certainly they were no longer to be seen anywhere."

"The food is ready, strangers," Nogab called from where he squatted close to the fire. Squatting, he was taller than Lydia. Right now his huge moon-face was wreathed in good nature as he dipped with an immense hand into a large shallow pan.

LYDIA shuddered as she moved to where Nogab and a half dozen others squatted. Then she sniffed and her reluctance to eat vanished at the savory odors which floated up from the pan. She was only a whit behind her husband and Wayne as they followed the pattern set by the rest. It was meat of some kind, but tasted like nothing she knew. Whatever it was, it was delicious.

They ate until they were filled. Oddly, they felt no thirst afterward.

The sun was just rising above the horizon when the last of them was done. Immediately afterward Nogab ordered them into the saddle. Lydia, Roger and Wayne were given the

meenas belonging to three who had fallen. Nogab stroked the short necks of the ugly beasts and whispered something into their ears and as if by magic the sulky beasts quieted. Nogab smiled as they mounted, rode forward until he was at the head of the column and waved his hand in a gesture that was as common as eating.

They rode straight into the sun.

The sun was sinking when they caught sight of their goal. They understood what Nogab had meant when he said there would be no food for them should they go on their own. The ride had been long and hard and they had rested for nothing. Nor had they seen man or beast. They had ridden into the midst of hills from the very start and as they went further the hills became higher until they were no longer hills but small mountains.

At the end they had mounted the crest of a last hill and, directly ahead, in the midst of a long verdant valley, nestled a city which could have been taken from a picture book of King Arthur's time. Castles, moats and all which went with the city were so like what they had in mind it should be they expected knights in armor to come riding forth from one of the gates.

Nogab halted his mount and waited for them to catch up. "The City of Light," he said. "My kingdom's heart.... No! But it is being besieged!"

The light was fading rapidly but, dim though it was and distant as the city was, they could see the thousands of men coming forward at a gallop at the far end of the city.

Nogab shouted an unintelligible something and raced his meena forward until he was once more leading his men. And this time they rode at a full gallop as swiftly as their beasts

could run. Lydia, Roger and Wayne were caught up in the heat of the race and found themselves riding in the midst of the purple giants, their bodies as low in the saddles as the others, their breaths coming as swiftly, their eyes straining against the coming darkness.

If it was in Nogab's mind to reach the city before the invaders, he was doomed to disappointment. They were still some distance off when they saw the first of the fires light the twilight and turn it to day. Then they were entering the long flat valley and their meenas were racing swift as the wind, their heads bent low, their long six-legged bodies hugging the ground.

WAYNE guessed they were within a mile of the city when suddenly, as if from the very earth, hundreds of men came racing to meet them. They had been hiding in the long grass and had but mounted their meenas the moment Nogab and the others came close enough for the trap to close on them.

Wayne had held onto the sword he had won in the struggle against the purple swordsman, but Roger and Lydia still had their rifles. They had refilled the magazines with shells from the cartridge belts. The stillness of the twilight was broken by the brisk chatter of their automatic fire as they emptied their guns at the oncoming riders.

Then the foe was about them and for the third time Roger, Wayne and Lydia were fighting for their lives. And once more the odds were against them. There was a difference this time, however. They had Nogab and his warriors fighting on their side.

The twilight became night and with its coming the moon rose and shed a mellow light over the battlefield. The battle raged in weird intensity, with

sometimes a single warrior pitted against another opponent and again one against three. The clash of steel resounded in clangorous clamour as sword met sword. Men shouted and screamed as they met head on and tried to chop each other from their saddles.

Wayne reined his mount in close to his friends and rode on one side of Lydia, while Roger stayed close to her on the other. For a short while they managed to stay that way. Then a group of the enemy rode down on them and Wayne was engaged in another battle for his life. His blade flashed in the moonlight as he cut and slashed with terrific strokes. He forgot all else except the glory of the battle and that in all the world nothing mattered as much as this.

It seemed that every sense had become sharper; he could see, hear, feel, as he never had before. These men around him. They were of another color and size, more nearly like himself. But like the others, they used swords and wore the leather harness about their middle. There were differences in other respects. Their hair, black as midnight, was worn long; their faces were painted and their expressions were ferocious and slightly mad. And though they weren't as expert in the use of the sword as were Nogab's warriors, they were utterly without fear.

Wayne brought three to the ground but as swiftly as he chopped others came at him. There was nothing else in this mad world of constant battle but to hew and cut and kill!

Wayne was covered with gore from head to foot. His fingers became slippery from it and after a while he found difficulty in holding the sword. More and more of the painted warriors came at him, until at the end he was surrounded by a mob of them. His

meena could not move and bellowed her hatred and resentment at the others who moved in a slow circle about her.

Wayne sat erect in the low saddle and watched the painted men narrow the circle of their approach. The similarity to Indians was startling. It was as if he were a Conestoga wagon and they were Comanches. He laughed aloud and waved his blood-covered sword for them to come in. Now and then one or two would dart out, break the circle momentarily, but return before engaging Wayne. And always the circle became tighter.

He knew what they intended. Suddenly they would come at him simultaneously. He might get one or two or even three, but no more surely. And Wayne Kenrick would be mincemeat under the cutting blades of these painted men, savages from a world impossible to imagine, for who but Roger Sherman could have made it come true.

THE THOUGHT of Roger brought the man and Lydia to mind. How ever were they making out? He rose in the odd stirrups and looked in every direction, trying to spot them. He saw men milling about, men slicing and hacking, men falling, being trampled, being killed, but of Roger Sherman and his wife Wayne saw nothing.

The thought that they might be among the fallen ones made him frantic. Casting his eyes about for a loophole of escape he saw nothing but the ever-tightening circle of painted warriors. Wayne Kenrick had a very devil of a temper, a temper which had sometimes cost him friends. Now he became a madman in his wild fury.

No longer content to sit in his saddle and await their coming Wayne now charged out, trying to pierce the

thin line of mounted men. But every time he did they would converge on him from all sides and try to pin him down. It was mere luck that they did not succeed. But he did not escape without wounds. His own blood was mixed with the blood of others. His charges became more and more frantic, more and more furious. And at the end availed him nothing.

He sat in his saddle, his figure no longer erect and resolute. He was now lax, his sword point held low, his eyes bleary and tired from the constant strain of searching for the tiny opening he needed. More and more of them kept coming in at him and it was becoming harder and harder to keep moving and fencing with them. Soon or late one of them would get in the blow which would decide the battle, and for good.

Suddenly it happened. He had just driven off two of them when four came at him from the rear. The circle was broken but not as he had wanted it to be. He whirled his meena, saw them coming in and summoned the last bit of strength and will-power he had and drove in at them. Two died before they could more than lift their swords in his direction. The third got in a sidelong thrust which took skin from Wayne's side. His headless trunk rode for a couple of yards before toppling from the saddle. But the fourth delivered the blow which took Wayne from the saddle.

Wayne had barely recovered from the backhand slice which had decapitated the third man when the fourth came on him. He barely got his sword up when the meena of the painted warrior slipped in one of the numerous pools of blood and skidded full into the meena of Kenrick's. Wayne, off balance tried desperately to hold onto the saddle with his knees but his sad-

dle was also wet with blood. His knees could not grab and as Wayne made a last desperate attempt to use his sword, the foe lunged wildly at him. Somehow Wayne managed to wade the lunging sword, but the other continuing in the line of his thrust plunged bodily into Wayne. A second later they were locked in each other's arms, fighting with feet, teeth and fists for each other's lives.

Lydia Sherman held the rifle against her hip and tried to aim but her plunging mount made aim impossible. After a few futile shots she let the rifle slip from her fingers in disgust and pulled the pistol from her holster. She realized that her one chance of survival was to get away from these painted men.

She turned toward where she had last seen Roger and saw to her horror that he was almost surrounded by the new enemy. He turned at the same instant, looked her full in the eyes and, with a despairing shout, called:

"Get away, dear! Quickly...!"

"No! Roger! I'm coming...." she sank her knees into the meena's side and tried to pull his head in the direction of where her husband was fighting for his life. But the meena turned stubborn, as if he had a will and consciousness of his own, and ran toward the outer edge of the rough circle the painted men had drawn about the forces of Nogab.

THE LAST she saw of her husband he was entirely surrounded by the strangers, and his arm was falling and rising as he used his rifle as a club.

Then her meena was racing free, the bit in his mouth and his belly almost to the ground, the six legs churning wildly in a mad burst of speed. Once more she tried to rein him in but his

strength was far greater than hers, and he had his head and was intending to keep it.

Please, she moaned within herself. Please, God. Don't let Roger go away. Save him. Please! The same words ran through her mind over and over again as she raced off into the moonlit night. She was unaware of the tears streaming down her cheeks; she was unaware of what went on about her, what she passed and did not see. Perhaps if she had, she would have lost all hope.

Suddenly her mount's speed slackened perceptibly and slowed almost to a trot. Once more she became aware of her surroundings and was surprised to find herself almost alone. She looked toward where another sound of a galloping meena paced with hers and gulped at what she saw. Swinging almost to the ground was a headless corpse, one foot still caught in the stirrups. The bloody trunk was bouncing along the ground with every bound of the animal's feet and blood spurted every time the severed throat struck. The man had died very shortly before.

She gagged, trying to hold foot down and it took every ounce of will-power to do so. But soon the two animals found divergent paths and the horror passed from view.

She was all alone on what seemed to be nothing so much as a moor, what with the stark cliffs rising on all sides, and the nearness of the city with its castle dominating the heights. She realized with sudden shock that her mount was bearing down on the city, as if he intuitively felt safety lay within its walls. Yet the heights were blood red with the glow of fire.

Now they entered a very shallow forest. And soon the beast and his burden emerged from it. The way led upward by means of a curving path

which seemed bent on meeting itself, so often did it twist and turn. The road was hard, of some material like granite, and the beast's feet pounded a loud tattoo on the surface. They were quite alone....

She was beginning to wonder, in that part of her mind which still functioned—for most of her was back in the muck of the fight—when the road would end, when suddenly the meena came to a dead halt, almost causing her to go headlong over its head. Lydia's head came up and what she saw facing her sent a scream of fear from her throat.

A solid line of mounted men barred their path to the gates of the city a couple of hundred yards ahead. They were tall men, though shorter than any she had seen on this strange world, but they were the most savage she had seen thus far. And there was something almost insane in the wild looks they sent her. Then, as if motivated by the same impulse, the whole line of mounted men leaped forward and screaming faces, grinning lips, drooling mouths, madness-filled eyes were all about her, and many hands were reaching for the bridle, bringing the meena to a halt.

She looked into the face of the nearest painted being, saw his hand come up to pull her from the saddle and felt her senses leave her in a blinding flash of light....

ROGER SHERMAN turned after giving his despairing call to his wife and flailed about him with his rifle. He lost count of the men he unseated and after a while only knew that he was beating at them with only the barrel of the rifle. The barrel was covered with blood, brains and hair.

Then he was quite alone.

He looked about him in a daze. The painted men were all about him.

They were seated on their meenas and staring at him. One of them, painted a deep vermilion on face, chest and arms, raised an arm and said:

"Hold, stranger. Unless you desire death to come swiftly...."

Roger shook his head weakly and let the broken rifle fall to the ground.

"Good! There is no time for talk. But Hagab would talk with you, I am sure of that. Follow us...."

Two of the painted men rode in on each side and took hold of the bridle, led the meena in a gallop after the others. Roger was too numb, too beaten and tired to do more than sit weakly in the saddle and let them take him where they willed.

The sounds of battle diminished and were heard no more as they led him away from the scene of carnage. Now and then other groups of riders joined them, some leading captives, but more frequently without until there more than two hundred of them.

They rode the crest of the hill until they reached a spot where it led downward in a gentle slope until they reached the flatland. Once level ground was reached they rode straight forward bound for the city on the hilltop in the distance. The dancing flames lighted their way.

The one who had called upon Roger to surrender rode alongside. Beaten and dispirited as Roger Sherman was he could not help but notice this man. This one was as different from Nogab and the first two whom Roger had met as the night was from the day.

His face was long, lean, aquiline, a study in immobility. The features were regular although the nose was hooked strongly. The eyes were deep-set and rather mournful. The contrast between this man and the others was so strong as to arouse the deepest curiosity in Roger. For it had taken no more than a single glance and he

had recognised a form of insanity among the others.

He was some sort of leader among them for he had gestured with a shake of his head for the guards to ride off and they left without a word of dissent. The two men rode side by side for some distance before the painted one said:

"Hagab will talk with you until he tires of the novelty...."

"And then....?" Roger asked.

"Who knows? Death. Torture. There are ways and means Hagab has of ending boredom. War, for example."

"I have not been here long," Roger said. "Yet long enough to see war is the end for all I have met. Do men do anything other than fight against one another in this strange and terrible world?"

"It is a form of insanity for Hagab's peoples. They live by the sword, therefore die by it. To be anything other than a warrior is to be born inferior."

"And you?" Roger asked pointedly.

"I....I am necessary," the other replied. "A set of rules condoning war must be formulated and given to the people. In some cases the regulatory body is called a government, in others, a religion. In Hagab's case he is both. I am the Grand Priest. I interpret the rules according to Hagab's desires. And since he is Hagab, ours is a life of war."

"You say you are the Grand Priest. Are there lesser ones?"

"The fewer the holders of titles, the better the government. Responsibility is a worm which feeds on itself. To give to many the rights of a few would make valueless those very rights. For the many would find diverse personal interpretations of those rights, whereas the few, holding the balance of power in their hands, would not have the need for interpretations. So with Ha-

gab and myself. He is the power, I, the interpreter. But always in Hagab's light."

THERE WAS a long silence while Roger digested what was said. How very modern this strange being was in his thoughts. Wherever the human species were the dominant factor someone among them evolved the theory of dictatorship. He wanted to find out more of this strange man and of his people.

"And how does one become Grand Priest? By appointment?"

The Grand Priest laughed, a brittle mirthless sound. "He is born to it," was his reply. "Once in every lifetime a neuter is born. That neuter becomes Grand Priest...."

"Incredible!" Roger breathed aloud. "A neuter in the human species. I have never heard of such a thing."

"I do not doubt but that in your world there would be many things I would find incredible," the other said. "For certainly you are from another world. If, for example, you were to relate in detail how you came to Wahoone, I would also say, incredible."

The mention of another world brought Lydia and Wayne to Roger's mind. Immediately all of his mind was brought to bear on those two.

"My—my wife!" Roger stammered. "She is back there on the battlefield. He is there too. These savages of yours, Grand Priest...they do not kill women...? Or," he was lost for a word, fearing to use the one in his mind. "...Harm them?"

There was neither mercy nor pity in the man's voice:

"I said these people are insane. Who is to say what an insane being will do?"

"Why didn't you try to stop them?" Roger burst out in outraged fury. "You stopped them from killing me."

"There was that short instant when their senses were dulled. I took advantage of it. Be thankful *your* life was saved."

"My life! What good is my life without hers?"

"I don't know," said the other coldly. "Not having the functions of either sex I find life holds other meanings."

Roger turned an embittered face from the other and kept his head lowered while he tortured himself with thoughts of what might have happened to Lydia. So engrossed was he, he did not notice that they had arrived at their goal.

"Be thankful, stranger," the voice of the Grand Priest broke into his thoughts, "that she was not taken prisoner. For see and hear what it would mean to be brought here—"

It did not seem possible that Roger Sherman had not heard at least the fury taking place on all sides. Now he looked about and the dazed look in his eyes deepened. They were on the outer edge of a vast encampment which had found its place almost beneath the walls of the city. Thousands of men were engaged in the colossal task of attempting to take this city. Huge catapults were sending large boulders over the walls and beyond. Battering rams were beating a tatoo on several of the gates a quarter of a mile away. Immense ladders sent their spindly lengths up the straight stone walls, and on these ladders men climbed, either to be knocked off or to gain the top of the wall. Now and then a ladder would come tumbling down and the men would spill from it to bounce once or twice and finally settle in one of the grotesque attitudes death gives at the end.

AS FOR the defenders, they too had their weapons against the

foe. Great cauldrons of boiling lead swung on divots along the edge of the wall. Now and then one of the cauldrons would tip and the night would become alive with orange light as the molten metal poured downward on whatever hapless ones were below. A whole battalion of sling-shot soldiers rooted behind the wall and sent their slings out into the moonlit night. Picked squads of pikemen dealt as best they could with the numerous ladders and men swarming upward on them.

There was sound and fury. But above all the noises of the living, the wounded and the dying, was the terrible sound of the fires raging in the city behind the walls. For Roger saw that not all the catapults hurled boulders. There were some which threw great flaming torches of pitch beyond the walls....

"Yes," Roger agreed in horrified yet thankful tones. "It is better that she should be dead."

"Come, stranger from another world. I see the tent of my chieftan, Hagab. Pray that he is in good humor...."

The tent proved to be four poles on which a roof of some sort of material had been laid. It was out of reach of the most powerful sling-shot and any other weapon they might possess. Men kept coming in and going out of the open walls constantly. Painted warriors marched in watchful parade before each of the four sides.

The two dismounted some few yards before the tent and stepped forward. The guards, recognizing the Grand Priest, let him pass without a word. And as they entered one side four men entering the opposite moved forward at the same time. They met before the raised dais in the center of the open square.

Roger took one look at the bedraggled woman they were dragging be-

tween them and his voice lifted in a wild shout:

"Lydia! Lydia. It's Roger...."

The figure on the throne rose at the sound of Roger's voice, turned his painted face toward Roger, then toward Lydia, and called in a high-pitched voice:

"Put them both to death. Hear me? To death. Both of them, I say.... Attend!"

Wayne Kenrick got his fingers about the other's throat, brought his own head down until it nestled along the painted one's, and started to squeeze. The man on the bottom became panicky as the pressure increased unbearably. His fingers pried and tore at the wrists of the man above. But slowly they weakened in their wild efforts and after a moment ceased altogether.

Wayne gave a final squeeze, grunted softly as he felt no further fight and started to get up from the dead man below him. But he hadn't gotten further than his knees when men fell on him, pinioning his arms, his legs, grabbing him about the throat with tearing fingers. He raged in silence, throwing himself wildly about in mad efforts to get rid of his burdens. But others joined those trying to make him prisoner and the struggles of the man on the bottom became weaker as the sheer weight of the numbers pressing him to the earth took their toll of his strength.

WAYNE HAD about given himself up to his Maker when suddenly there were hoarse voices growling their war cries and Wayne felt the weight above him lighten. Once more he attempted to get to his feet and this time succeeded. His breath was coming from him in tortured gasps, every nerve in his body cried aloud for rest, his muscles ached intolerably with

even the slightest movement he made, yet a will which was without knowledge of defeat spurred him on.

"Quickly!" a loud voice made him whirl in its direction. "This way...."

It was Nogab! He and a dozen of his warriors had cleared a path for Wayne and now they were fighting their way toward where they had left their mounts. A sword was thrust into Wayne's grasp as he charged forward. Four huge figures raced at his side, their weapons clearing a path among the howling painted savages.

Nogab was already astride a meena as Wayne dashed up. The giant reached down and with an easy effort lifted Wayne to the saddle of the meena alongside Nogab's own.

"Give him the heel!" Nogab shouted as he spurred his mount to action.

But escape was not a simple matter. Time after time the painted men raced in to intercept them and time after time Wayne found himself swinging to either side as men tried to cut him off. Never had Wayne known such blood-thirsting as these madmen showed, never such a blindness to danger.

But no flesh and blood could long withstand the punishing blows of Nogab and the remnants of his warriors. For these men were the finest of his warriors. And now they were fighting against odds closer to even. So it was not long until they were racing free up the hillside and the dying sounds of battle were behind them.

If Wayne thought for an instant that they were safe the feeling was soon dispelled. Nogab called something to his warriors and reined his mount in until Wayne rode alongside.

"What are you called, stranger?" he asked as they rode side by side.

"Wayne Kenrick."

"It has a strange flavor," Nogab said. Then softly, as if savoring the

sound of the words, "Wayne. Wayne Kenrick. H'm! Well then, Wayne Kenrick, it appears as though your friends have been lost. Do not sorrow after them. We on Wahoos soon learn that life is fleeting. The edge of a sword is sharp and can cut the thread of life very quickly. Therefore—"

Wayne looked up at the other. What the hell was he talking about? Maybe this big guy thought Roger and Lydia were gone, but he didn't. Somehow, they'd get free of that rout. He grinned up at the huge face and said:

"I'm not worried about them! I'm worried about us. Is this the end? What do we do now?"

"Ho! A true warrior. He asks for the future. Good, small man of the strong arms! Nogab will yet give you your fill of fighting. Now we ride where Nogab will be safe for a while. My city is gone. But I have lost it before and retaken it. Time. That is all we need. Time. Therefore give the heels to the meena and follow—"

Daylight was breaking when they reached the desolate place which was Nogab's goal. They rode the valley floor of a desert. On all sides the cliffs stretched their battlements upward into the blue. They had entered the place through a narrow defile between the sides of two of these cliffs, a defile easily defended and impossible to breach. Certainly it would be an impossibility to effect surprise, for sentinels stationed on the mesa top could spot intruders long before they reached the place.

NOGAB POINTED to openings along the cliff walls. "Caves. We have used them before. And now they will come in handy. The mad ones have won this time. Hagab and his painted warriors will taste the fruits of victory for the present. But soon the fruit will poison them."

Wayne wiped the sweat from his brow and said:

"Look, Jack! I'm the sort of guy who gives a man credit for a good try. So you get the Wayne Kenrick E for it. But tell me. How do we go about getting even? There are only ten of you, eleven if you count me."

Nogab's flat grey eyes closed momentarily in thought. The muscles jutted in ridges along the wide thick cheekbones. His wide rather thin mouth became thinner as he lost himself in thought.

"We on Wahoön fight one against the other. Now and then I ask myself why this must be. But it has been so since time began for us. But though we fight one against another, there is one common enemy, Hagab and his painted idiots.

"We fight fairly. But they kill for the sake of shedding blood. A man's back is as good a goal as his chest. Better, for he can not see the blow from the rear and has no defense for it. But much as we hate Hagab and his we have never tried to act as one against him. So divided we have fought against each other and against him. Perhaps a new way must be found?"

"Yeah," Wayne said shortly. "But what do you intend doing? There are still only eleven of us."

"There are only four directions," Nogab pointed out. "So all the men I need for the task I have in mind are four men. One to each point. They will ride out and spread the news far and wide. And in a very short time men will flock to the hills and there will be enough to go forth and fight again."

"Oh, goody!" Wayne exclaimed. "So that'll leave seven of us. Enough, I'm sure to hold off a whole army of men."

"Right," Nogab said as he set his meena's head toward a narrow thread

of path which went up in zig-zag pattern. Nogab's voice came back at Wayne as he followed suit; "...You'll understand better when we reach the summit."

"Clever, you Wahoön," Wayne said. He was looking straight down the sheer wall of cliffside. Fifty feet opposite the other cliff ended, cut off sheer, as if by the blade of some gigantic cutter. A bridge of rock, some fifty feet across at the width, connected the two cliffs. Men could stand on either side of the bridge and make mincemeat of anything trying to pass below. Certainly there were enough boulders. And the path at the valley mouth entering this frightening place was only nine or ten feet wide. "Clever," Wayne reiterated.

Nogab grinned at him, turned his mount's head and started off in the direction of a cave opening a short distance away. Wayne followed. And as he rode along there suddenly intruded a thought. He wondered how the machinery Roger Sherman had set in motion was still functioning....

NOGBAB'S LOUD voice detailing some of the men to seek out food brought Wayne back to the present. He sighed deeply and thought with grim unconcern that it didn't make much difference any more whether the machinery functioned or not. He was quite sure he and the others were doomed to stay on Wahoön the duration of their natural lives. And it was highly possible that the situation might end suddenly, with the way people waved swords about in lethal manner.

"Come, Wayne Kenrick," Nogab said. "Let me show you the wonders of the caves."

Wayne leaped from the meena and followed the other, who was waiting at the entrance. As Wayne started af-

ter the purple giant he gulped audibly. He had been engrossed in his thoughts to such a degree he hadn't noticed the path the meena had trod. Now he saw. And wondered how so large a beast managed to negotiate the narrow path leading to the cave. There was a foot of room from the sheer wall to the edge and below the desert floor showed its barren face, a full thousand feet below.

Within the cave itself one forgot what was outside. In reality the cave was an immense grotto, fifty feet high and fully two hundred feet in width. The depth was clothed in gloom so far ahead was it. A strange inner illumination gave a soft light and put things in a mellow glow. Nogab threw himself onto a pile of skins in a corner and motioned for Wayne to sit alongside.

"This doesn't have the comforts of my palace home," Nogab said as he lay back among the odorous skins. "But on the other hand it is a great deal safer."

Wayne sniffed audibly, sighed and said:

"Probably smells cleaner too. But like you say, it's a lot safer here. How long before chow? I'm a bit on the hungry side."

"Chow?"

"Food. The stuff what fills our guts. The without which we cannot exist."

"Not too long. I hope your stomach is not the queasy kind?" Nogab said, a gleam of laughter deep in his eyes.

"Not mine! I can eat anything. Or almost anything. There are some things, I admit, which do not sit too well. On the other hand I've never been quite this hungry before."

"Good! Then you will eat. Aah! There are times I could do without the affairs of state and just relax in my cave and let all Wahoon go to

blazes," Nogab sighed. "Then I get restless and wish some woman of my harem and the whole thing starts all over again."

"Women...? You mean the opposite sex? I'd almost forgotten them. What do they look like?"

"Like myself, of course," Nogab answered blandly. "Oh, a bit shorter perhaps, and thinner. But a great deal like myself," Nogab answered blandly.

"All of them?" Wayne asked in amazement.

"In my city. Yet they tell me that the Queen of Minat has charms which have satisfied and aroused many men. But she is white, and thin and short and has no muscle worth the mention...."

"A-a white woman... A queen? Tell me more, pally. Do I get to meet the gal?"

"I don't know. One of the men will seek her out. If she is in the mood, or angry with Hagab for some slight or other, she will come. If not, then we will have to do without her bowmen."

"Then let's hope she and Hagab have pftt, as Winchell would have put it. A white woman and gorgeous. Of course, there's the matter of your taste, Nogab old pal. And who knows what that is...?"

HESTA, QUEEN of Minat, paced the courtyard of her palace. Moving with a gentle grace which belied the ferocity of their natures, two *helats* padded alongside. Now and then they would look at the angry woman with their violet eyes and purr as if in understanding. For their anger was also quick to flame. And their sixth sense told them their mistress was very angry.

Suddenly she whirled and faced the huge purple warrior standing respect-

fully near a fountain in which water spouted from a gargoyle face of stone. Her breasts heaved within the metal plates holding their full firmness and as she whirled the thin strands of metal which hung from a sort of girdle about her middle sang a metallic tune.

"So the painted idiot and his Grand Priest are on the march again, eh?" she said softly. But her eyes were ablaze in anger and her face mirrored it. "Hagab and his insane minions must be stopped! And this time for good and all!

"Go back to that big fool Nogab and tell him I join him. If your King had sense in proportion to his size all would be well on Wahooon. Who else does he seek?"

"I do not know, mighty Queen," the giant said. "I came but to seek you."

"Very well. Go back to Nogab and tell him I ride. I will meet him at the caves."

The messenger bowed with a jerky movement of his head, turned and left. Hesta watched him depart with a sudden narrowing of her eyes and stepped to the fountain. She relaxed on a stone bench and the helats made themselves comfortable at her feet. Her mind busied itself in appraising the situation.

Nogab was not quite a fool, merely foolhardy. He would never delegate to others any task of valor which he could not do himself. She had a very good idea how it came about that Nogab was not in his city at the time it was attacked. Someone had come to him with a tale of seeing a party or other and Nogab had thought it would be good sport to seek them out, for the sheer joy of matching blades with them.

She thought of the others whom Nogab had doubtlessly sent for and a frown creased the wide marble of her forehead. Now if Rebak were chief

of his tribe.... But he wasn't. Goota was. And Goota was lazy, a lover of women and food, not battle. Goota would send promises, and forget them an instant after he made the lightest.

As for the other two, well, they would but make excuses.

She thought of her four thousand bowmen. They would chop the forces of Hagab and the Grand Priest to bits. But at a distance. Soon or late, however, the enemy would break through the hail of arrows and then swordsmen would be needed. The question in her mind was whether Nogab had enough men left to make a force large enough to contend against Hagab and the Grand Priest.

Her dark eyes clouded as she rose and strode toward the inner court. The helats paced beside her again. She dismissed them with a low sound and called to one of four men awaiting her in the small inner court:

"Sitke! Here.... The rest of you return later.... Now, Sitke, I have news for you. The painted idiot and his insane followers have struck again. And this time I have made my mind up to destroy him forever. Nogab has fled to the caves. They have taken his city and the great fool is left without followers. He seeks our help.

"What men have we and how soon can we march?"

THE SHORT, slender man in the unadorned metal harness looked reflectively at his Queen. He was not a youngster by any means but despite his lack of size there was something vital, something immensely strong, in the way he carried himself, in the look of his piercing glance. He was chief of all her forces and she would not call them to arms without his desires in the matter. That is in ordinary circumstances. But Sitke was on the conservative side. He disliked be-

ing forced into a position not of his own choosing.

So she took the bit in her teeth and forced the issue.

"I dislike Hagab and the string-puller, the Grand Priest, as much as you do, Mighty Queen. But I would wait until they are sated with conquest and are easier prey," Sitke said.

"I know how Sitke feels," Hesta said. "But he did not answer my questions."

Sitke smiled grimly. This woman who was his Queen sometimes made things difficult for him. Fortunately for her his men were well-trained and ready. They could march this very instant if she desired. So he said.

"Good! We will live off the country. See to it that this night finds us on our way."

Sitke bowed and marched out. The bowmen of Miniat would soon find target for their tipped arrows....

Yes, thought Hesta, as she watched the slender figure from sight. This night would see her on her way. And may the great Gods be with her to the end. For she was bound to make an end of Hagab and his Grand Priest....

WAYNE WATCHED the long line of mounted warriors file into the pass. Nogab, seated on his haunches, turned with a broad smile to Wayne and said:

"There. Queen Hesta's bowmen. It is said any one of them can split a man's nose down the center at a hundred paces. See. The woman beside the slender man; Queen Hesta, herself, has come to lead her men."

"Yipe!" Wayne spoke aloud. Then to himself, what a gal! Why she could make most of Hollywood's best seem shabby and fake. This woman had real beauty. And what was more, a perfectly normal person. And white-

skinned, not purple, or blue, or green. White! "Yeah," he spoke aloud again. "She's all right, Queen Hesta is. Just remember this boy when we meet her."

Nogab nodded, lifted himself to his full fifteen feet of height, raised his voice in a shout of greeting heard the length of the valley floor and waved the mounted bowmen on.

A short while later Nogab, Wayne and the six of Nogab's followers raced out to meet the van of Queen Hesta's warriors. Wayne, riding a pace behind Nogab, looked on the newcomers with approval. These men, who sported long bows and quivers of arrows, certainly seemed fit and ready for anything. Then they were past the vanguard and the meenas were sliding to a halt before a half dozen men and a woman on a snow-white meena.

Nogab dismounted and Wayne followed suit. In a second or two stood before the woman. There was no pretense to Nogab. His greeting of the woman was casual and easy:

"Hesta. Hah! Strange that I am always in need of your services. Well, small woman of the large army, what think you?"

Wayne looked at his friend in surprise. Nogab had said he had *heard* of her. He hadn't mentioned knowing her. Well, blast the purple devil. He had been ribbing Wayne all the time. Wayne grinned in recollection.

"What does that one find to smile at?" Hesta asked, looking sharply at Wayne, whose attire now consisted of torn breeches and scuffed boots. The shirt had been torn to shreds and discarded.

"This one?" Wayne asked, pointing to himself, then turning this way and that as if in search of another person.

"Ah! Nogab has found himself a buffoon to amuse himself with," Hesta said. "Well. Keep him out of my

sight. He amuses me not! Now then, Who else has answered your summons? Goota...Joto?"

"No!" Nogab said darkly. "Goota said he has not the men for it. But if you ask me he has not the belly for it. As for Joto, he is the farthest from the caves. The messenger has not returned as yet."

"I think perhaps we had better wait for Joto. His warriors are not as fine as yours, but at least he has them all within call. Goota is best forgotten, although I wish Rebak were King instead of the fat one. How many men do you think you can gather?"

"They know I am here," Nogab said. "It's a matter of how many can escape and how many have. Perhaps things are not too bright in the City of Light."

"Not if we know Hagab," Hesta said. "But let us now talk of what must be done. My cave is prepared for me, I hope?"

"But of course, Queen Hesta," Nogab said glibly as he mounted his meena and rode at her side.

WAYNE WAITED until the two passed, and grinned within himself as the woman gave him a sidelong look as she and Nogab passed him. She was interested, Wayne decided as he turned his mount's head, and followed. She was a stunning woman, he thought. Reminded him of Lydia Sherman.... Lydia Sherman! And her husband. Suddenly he thought of them. And a cotton coated his tongue. His dearest friends! Where were they? What had happened to them...?

"...To death I say," Hagab's high-pitched voice commanded.

The guards raised their swords above Lydia instantly.

But the Grand Priest's voice was an unguent, soothing Hagab: "Mighty Hagab! I bring you guests to amuse

your hours. And you become angry...."

"Well," Hagab turned petulant. "I was *so* busy! Must I hear them? Can't you remove them for just a *little* while?"

"Of course, Mighty King," the other said, taking Roger's arm. "Bring the woman here, guards."

Roger, almost at the point of collapse, barely was able to hold the body of his wife as she sagged in his arms. The Grand Priest marched ahead, obviously unconcerned with Lydia's condition. Willing himself not to give up, Roger resorted to harsh measures:

"Damn you!" he growled. "What the hell sort of cow are you? Had I thought you were the kind who gave up at the first sign of defeat I'd have gone alone with Wayne—"

He felt her stiffen, and though he did not look at her he could feel her eyes search his face.

"Why you-you! Oh, darn you!" Lydia wailed as she tried to wrest herself free of his arms. "Who's the cry-baby now? Who's complaining now...?"

"There! That's better," Roger said, gripping Lydia strongly. "I was afraid you were going to pass out. And that would be the wrong thing to do now."

She smiled weakly in sudden understanding and clung to him as they followed the Grand Priest into the open. They were surprised to see that the night was already fading into dawn. They looked simultaneously toward the city walls and saw that the painted horde of Hagab had gained entry. Three of the four gates on the near wall had been forced and men streamed into the breeches on foot and on the six-legged meenans.

But they saw all this in passing as they continued to follow the Grand Priest. His goal was also a tent, but

his was enclosed on all sides. It was neither as large nor as elaborate; in fact, the man and woman found it rather simple in its furnishings. A heap of pillows in one corner served the neuter as sleeping quarters. There were silk-like materials lying in scattered profusion and the entire tent floor was lined with carpets so that the foot never touched the ground.

The Grand Priest motioned for the two to make room for themselves at his feet. Roger arranged a small heap of pillows for Lydia and after seeing to it that she was comfortable, made room for himself at her side. The neuter's face wore a crooked smile as he watched the other.

"Your solicitous manner interests me," he said. "Is it the usual custom in your land?"

"Yes," Lydia replied. "You seem amused by it."

"So little amuses me, allow me this bit."

"This time, priest," Roger said, "you have placed me forever in your debt. For this time it was my wife's life you saved."

"All this talk of saving of lives bores me," the Grand Priest said. "You still do not know to what end I saved them. Until then do not speak of gratitude. For the present, if you wish, you may speak with your woman. I find the need for meditation—"

ROGER AND Lydia talked in low tones. There was so much to talk of, and yet, so little. Wayne Kenrick, whether he was still alive; Hagab, what his intentions were; themselves, and their future. But in the end their conclusions came to nothing. Suddenly they became aware of the bright glance of the man before them.

"Tell me, stranger," the neuter said, "something of this land from which

you come. I am most curious about it."

Roger talked at great length until he became aware of the fact that neither he nor Lydia had had anything to eat for a very long time.

"....But certainly," the Grand Priest said when Roger made known his and his wife's hunger. "Immediately!"

He clapped his hands and two guards stepped in. The neuter ordered them to bring food and drink and after a short wait they returned, each bearing a large platter on which were platters of food and pitchers of some strange warm drink which tasted a great deal like tea.

"...So," said the neuter after they had satisfied their hunger and thirst, "no matter what the plane of existence, men and the ways they attain their ends are the same."

"Well," Roger broke in. "Not quite."

"The difference is only in the manner of interpretation," said the other. "The words have the same meanings. Then why do you feel strange here?"

"Because here insane beings rule," Roger declared.

"No more insane than some who rule on this Earth you come from."

Damn the man, Roger thought. He argues like a lawyer. Yet with force and logic. "But on Earth," Roger said, "the forces of good are greater than the forces of evil."

"Let us not fence with words," the other said wearily. "Good, evil. Neither has meaning without the other. When the two forces are equal in all ways they simply cancel each other out. Here, we are the forces of evil. Hagab is the Prince of evildoers. But all the other rulers on Wahoon are warlords, also. Then who has the right to call the other evil...?"

"I see what you mean," Roger said.

"Therefore stop making war! Stop killing! Stop the wanton and brutal murder of helpless people! And you will not know of evil."

"There is a saying on Wahoon: 'He who will cast the last stone will be without blemish.' I interpret it thusly: 'The strongest sword will win the battle,'" the Grand Priest said. "After that, the swordsman must be sure only that his blade is ever sharp and there will be none who will question his right to rule."

"Then someone will come along with a spear, or arrow," Roger said.

"Not if there are none left to use."

"True! But there are not enough men at your command to make that dream come true," Roger said triumphantly.

THE NEUTER smiled politely, but irritation showed in his narrowed eyes. "Hagab is a master of extermination," he said sharply.

"That sissy!" Lydia suddenly exploded into words. She had been an interested spectator. Now she took an active part. "He does exactly as you tell him. I don't know who or what you are but this I do know. You're the one who does the telling around here."

"A more discerning person, this woman you call wife," the neuter said.

Of course, Roger berated himself for not seeing it before. He had been misled by the other's words. The Grand Priest was the motivating force behind this war. But why? What had he to gain?

"If my wife speaks the truth," Roger said aloud, "I understand nothing. Least of all you."

"Man is a combination of many things, all working toward opposite ends, none of which have anything in common with one another. But I am not man. I am... *nothing*! Yet all the

inner workings of which we have no exterior consciousness, the below-conscious self, are in constant convulsion within me. I am torn among many poles. Perhaps the clue that is me lies in the last detail of the *master plan* within my brain? If so then the end will justify the means."

Lydia and Roger looked at each other in amazement at this being. What did he mean by 'master plan'? What was the end he spoke of? But before they could continue their questioning, the neuter spoke again:

"The day is almost upon us. Let us find peace in sleep. We will speak again...."

The gentle touch on Roger's shoulder awakened him. He looked up into the painted face of the Grand Priest. "Come, my friend," the Grand Priest said. "Hagab awaits us."

Roger yawned, felt the rough beard and wished for a razor. He nudged Lydia, who opened her eyes, smiled up at him, and said:

"So soon? I could sleep forever. Guess not, though. Ask the man if it's possible to get a bath. I feel as though I'd been working at digging coal the past few days."

"The beard is a manly attribute," the neuter said as he stepped back and waited for them to rise. "As for bathing.... Later. After Hagab talks with you. He does not like women who have odors."

Roger stopped smiling and peered searchingly into the other's eyes. Satisfied with what he saw there, he said:

"I see. Well, rise and shine, dear. The big, bad monarch awaits us."

"Pooh!" Lydia said as she followed the other two. "He won't even get a curtsey from me."

Both Lydia and Roger were large breakfast eaters. But their hunger was dissipated as they moved beside the Grand Priest. They were coming up

the wide, short incline toward the gate which led into the city. Squads of painted warriors were dragging the corpses which clogged the gate, to an immense trench which had been dug, and were casting them into it. Lydia tried to shut the scenes of horror from her eyes but it was as impossible as it was to close one's nose to the smell of death.

At last their ordeal was over.

A GUARD of honor awaited them just beyond the gate. They followed the squad of men up narrow streets, filled with warriors, past well-built houses of natural stone behind which people hid, to the last street which led to the castle on the hill. There was no portcullis or moat before the castle, a something they had expected. But in almost all other details it was as if it had been reconstructed from a sixteenth century English Baronial dwelling.

The place was swarming with the painted warriors. They followed the neuter through arched passageways which led into rooms cluttered with the wreck of war. Here and there charred beams and furniture showed where the painted warriors had had to use fire to rout out the defenders. At last they came to what might have been called the reception room.

It was immense, fully a hundred feet by eighty. The ceiling rose fifty feet above the floor level. It too showed the evidence of flame having bitten deeply into it. At the far end of the vast room Hagab held court on a low dais.

He sat sprawled on the throne, his legs stretched straight out in front of him, his head resting against the back of the heavy chair which was too large for him, and his right cheek almost resting on his shoulder. Now and then he would wave a hand list-

lessly as someone of the many warriors there would ask something. Or he would issue an order in his petulant, high-pitched voice. He spotted the Grand Priest and his charges coming and waved all the others away.

"Are you also coming with some personal foolishness?" Hagab asked. "It can't be that you want this creature of a female? What would you do with her?"

THERE WAS a chorus of squealing laughter at the words. The Grand Priest smiled at the words.

"Mighty" Hagab jests," he said. "It is good! No, Mighty King. I but wish a small request—"

"A request? Not *you!* These men of action—how I admire them—do nothing but desire things. Women, slaves, booty they claim is theirs by right of conquest. And Poor Hagab has nothing to do but grant his painted children their *small* requests. But no one asks if *I* desire anything.

"Do I, Grand Priest?"

The smile on the neuter's lips did not go away. But a small cloud passed across the wide brow. He did not like the tone of the voice. Hagab was irritated, for some reason. His pettishness, his eyes half-closed as if in drowsiness, all were signs of discontent.

"Mighty Hagab has but to ask, and it shall be given him," the neuter said soothingly.

But this time the soft words did not effect their purpose.

"Why must I always *ask*? Why does not someone *anticipate* my wishes?" Hagab demanded, accenting words with an oddly feminine tone.

"Mighty King," the Grand Priest said with awe in his voice. "Once again you have read my mind! Always I am amazed at your super-sense. Only a short while ago I ar-

ranged "for a spectacle—some of the prisoners against several mad meenas, a company of our warriors against a company of the purple giants—and came with the good news. But already you anticipated the surprise. I am crestfallen."

The long narrow head came away from the back of the huge throne and Hagab's eyes opened wider. A small smile of pleasure showed crooked rotting teeth.

"I should have known my Priest would not fail me. But for once he was wrong. I have seen these things before. Oh, I admit it is amusing to watch the giants fight with bare hands against my painted children. And watch them get spitted against the long, sweetly-sharp blades. But I have seen it before. I want new thrills, sharper sensations, more exquisite pleasures. Ah! I have it! Those two. Perhaps I can think of a something which would amuse me no end?"

"Something tells me they are strange to this world. Am I right, Grand Priest?"

"Hagab is ever right," the neuter intoned.

"H'm She is too thin, too...." Hagab sniffed and made a face of disgust. "...too *smelly*. Perhaps if she were given a bath. But I l've meat on my bones. H'm! I simply can't think in all this foul wreckage. Why couldn't Nogab have a palace more in keeping with his position? But I suppose it will have to do. Now where was I....? Oh, yes. The two of them. Suppose you keep them for a while, Priest? And keep me reminded of your charges. Go now. I weary of talk—"

ROGER LET his breath out in a long sigh as they reached the open. The neuter smiled in sympathy. As for Lydia, her face still mirrored

the terrible shock she had undergone.

"That was pretty close, Lydia," Roger remarked in a low voice. "For a second or two I thought it was all over."

"Yes," the neuter said. "Now and then Hagab feels that he must have his way. Sometimes he is persistent about it. Fortunately, we are not in our own city. He would have found ways and means of using both of you, had we been. But you are safe for the while—"

"Just for the while," Lydia murmured. "I wasn't afraid of that painted man before. Now I am. And sick of it."

"We-we have to stick it out, Lydia," Roger said.

"To what-end? How long have we been here? Oh, Roger! I'm so afraid!"

"Of what, darling?" he took her in his arms and tried to comfort her. But she shook herself free.

"Of everything. Of this horrible place and these horrible men. Afraid that we will never get back to the time-cleft. And most of all, afraid that when we do, it will not help. We're doomed to stay here forever, Roger!"

She was close to hysteria and Roger tried to quiet her. They had entered a road down which men were marching toward them. They could not see them as yet—the road curved just beyond them—but the sound was coming closer. Lydia's voice had risen at the end until it was a shrill wail. Once more Roger attempted to take her in his arms. But this time she threw herself back and looked wild-eyed at him. Another instant and he knew she would give way to hysteria.

He acted on the instant. His long arm reached out and slapped her hard across the cheek, once and again. His fingers showed red against the suddenly pale skin. Her eyes went wide

and her mouth opened. And Roger slapped her again.

Just as the first of the company of painted warriors rounded the curve and came at them.

"No," the Grand Priest murmured softly. "You shouldn't have . . ."

But it was, too late.

Like a pack of lusty hound dogs baying at the moon, so did they sound as they came rushing forward straight for the three. There were some fifty in the company and they filled the street from one end to the other. They crowded close about the three and peered at them with their insane eyes. Their slack mouth drooled spittle down their chins and they nudged each other and laughed in their high, shrieking voices.

Though Lydia could not understand their words, she could guess at the meanings and gestures. Her face flamed scarlet as she drew herself closer to Roger. Roger retreated slowly until he felt the rough stone of a house at his back.

"Get away from us, damn you!" he grated at several who insisted on following.

"Damn you. Damn you . . ." they parroted the words. And came ever closer, their fingers prying at the woman, questing in obscene gesture.

ROGER SHOVED at the hands; trying to fend them off. They thought it funny and became more insistent. One tried to insert himself between the two and Roger shoved him aside. The laughing lips drew back in a sudden snarl and the hand flew to the long sword in the leather scabbard. Roger did not wait for the other to pull the weapon free. His fist came up almost from his knee and caught the painted idiot squarely on the button. The blow sent the other backward to land in an unconscious

heap on the street.

The howling voices took up a new note. Blood was to be spilt now . . .

"Hold! They are under Hagab's protection!" the Grand Priest threw himself before Roger and Lydia, his arms stretched wide in protection.

It was his last gesture and his last words. A dozen swords pierced him through. They were in blood-heat. Not even Hagab could have stopped them.

Lydia threw herself on Roger, pressed her face against his shoulder and waited for death to come. Roger watched the body of the Grand Priest slump to the ground in wide-eyed amazement. Truly, he thought, they were insane! For perhaps the interval of a couple of seconds nothing happened. Then they came at Roger and Lydia.

But they did not quite reach them though the sword tips of the closest were but inches away. For suddenly the door of the house against which he had drawn his wife opened, and a score of purple giants poured from within. In an instant the street was filled with battling men. And a voice was calling to them:

"Inside! Quickly!"

Roger turned in the direction of the voice. It was issuing from the depths of the doorway to the house against which he was leaning. One of the purple-colored giants was standing on the threshold, one arm outstretched for Roger's grasping. There was no hesitancy. Roger lifted Lydia bodily and took the step sideways and the giant's hand took hold of his and lifted both Roger and Lydia into the shelter of the doorway.

"Straight back," the giant said. "My woman will lead you to safety . . ." And he was gone to join his fellows in their battle.

"Follow me," a hoarse voice said.

Roger and Lydia peered into the gloom of the passage and saw only a few feet from them the huge shape of the woman the giant had mentioned. Lydia gasped at the size of the woman, then remembered that certainly the women had to be in proportion to their men. This one was. A full ten feet in height, she was enormous. She waited only until Roger and Lydia saw her, then turned and trotted down the passage.

They soon discovered that the house was built along the same large lines as were the giants. The passage was long and twisting and had a slant downward. They could hear the lumbering movement of the woman ahead of them but could not see her in full although now and then they caught glimpses of her. Then, with a suddenness that was startling, they arrived at their goal.

Light bloomed from a dozen torches stuck into the walls. Smoke drifted in clouds from the torches and made them choke for air. But after a moment they became used to it and only when a current of air forced the smoke directly at them did they mind.

"Ho!" their guide shouted. "I have brought them."

TO ROGER'S and Lydia's amazement the entire group were women. But never had they imagined such women. Their huge breasts were encased in leather breastplates and harnesses of leather were about their middles. Their arms and legs were heavy with muscle and each woman carried a long sword hanging in a scabbard, as well as a shorter stabbing blade for close work.

They crowded around the two and examined them with a frankness that was embarrassing. There was a universal shaking of heads.

"How can they help us?" one

asked. "The woman is so small and thin and weak-looking? I could carry her around in my pouch...."

Another said: "The man is not much larger. My Ugat is not a large man as men go. But this one. Bah! Ugat could make three of him."

"Quiet," their leader shouted. "These are strangers Nogab befriended. Are we to pass judgment? My Hetab said to protect them and bring them to the caves. If none of you are willing to help then I shall do it alone."

There was a moment of grumbling following the words but it was grumbling without rancor. And after a moment they began to file from the cellar, their guide at the head of the procession, and Lydia and Roger immediately behind. The rest followed in quick order.

The cellar, the two strangers to the City of Light discovered, was connected by the underground passage to other cellars, and eventually to a place just within the city walls. Roger wondered if they would pick up recruits on the way but though they walked for a long while not a soul either joined or disturbed them. Several of the women, including their leader, had removed one of the torches from the wall-hangings in which they hung, and carried them to furnish light to their journey. Suddenly the woman in the lead extinguished the light by shoving the blazing end into a crack in the wall.

Her hoarse voice rasped backward at the others:

"Done! We are at the wall. Careful, now! This is not the time or place to be caught. Herti and Meli, stand by the strangers while I and the others look about. It should be dark enough and the moon does not rise till late."

Roger could see the opening. It was a circle of lighter darkness against the

blackness of their tunnel. The two women their guide had designated took their posts by the side of Roger and Lydia and waited until the signal that all was clear, was given. Time went by slowly, interminably for them. Then Roger, eyes still intent on the circle of the tunnel opening, saw some of it closed off and knew one of the huge women was returning.

"The way seems clear," the woman announced. "Keri says to bring them on."

A short while later the five were standing beside the others grouped along the wall itself. Keri, the one who had been their guide, whispered in hoarse tones:

"The gate is but a few paces off. It seems unguarded. Usually there are no more than five of the painted idiots standing watch at this time. But I cannot see any of them. Shall we risk it?"

There was but one who answered in the negative. Keri shook her huge head in satisfaction and said:

"We will all make the run together. Keep the strangers in the middle to protect them.... To the gate!"

THEY WERE almost at the gate itself when the ambush fell upon them. Men rose from the ground, howling like banshees, waving their swords, screaming for their blood, and ran toward them from all sides.

"The gate is open!" Keri's great voice rose above the shrieking. "Make for it!"

As one, the entire group of women dashed for the gate. Roger felt his arms taken by two of the women and turned to see Lydia similarly taken up. Then he was being carried, feet off the ground, toward their goal. But they did not make it. A wall of liv-

ing warriors formed before it and barred their path. The fight broke off into single engagements. And in self-defense, the women who were attempting to save Roger and Lydia were forced to defend themselves.

"It is the two! Hagab wants them alive!" a voice shrilled a command.

And a moment later the man and woman were surrounded by the howling savages. The last Roger saw of the giantess, she was driving a whole squad of the painted idiots through the gate by the sheer force of her blows. Then arms pinioned his and men shrieked obscenities into his ear and he and Lydia were being dragged toward the city and the castle on the hill....

Wayne sat cross-legged on the floor of the cave. The narrow circle of seated figures held Queen Hesta, Nogab, and Sitke besides himself. They were discussing a plan for the retaking of the City of Light and the annihilation of Hagab and the Grand Priest.

Although Wayne did not look at Hesta directly, except when he spoke to her, he could feel her eyes on his face, time and time again. He knew he flushed every time she did it, but could not help himself. Never had he known a woman who could make him feel as he did, for from the very first he felt an attraction toward her that was magnetic. And that she felt the same was soon apparent.

Soon after they had arrived at the cave she and Nogab went off somewhere to talk in privacy. It was soon after her return that Wayne noticed the difference in attitude toward him. Evidently Nogab had spoken highly of his prowess with a sword, and of his indomitable bravery. For from that moment on she never again addressed him as a buffoon.

Several other things about her too,

his attention. Without being too forcing or demanding, she took the lead. Nogab seemed content that she did. It was evident that she had more than beauty at her command. She was intelligent, forceful, clever, and had more than ordinary common sense. The plan she evolved was simple, yet was bound to be effective.

After they had waited well into the next morning for the arrival of the fourth messenger and he had not come, Hesta called them together for a conference.

"We cannot wait any longer," she said. "We can always leave men here to wait. And if the messenger brings reinforcements, then surely it will be to the good. The issue is this: Shall we wait until Hagab consolidates his position or strike now? Nogab tells me he thinks there may be as many as two thousand of his warriors within the city, hiding and armed. Further, he says that there are twice the number of women as men, and they are even more formidable than the men as fighters.

"Now we can send some of his warriors to the walls of the city where they can gain entrance and let those within know of our coming. So that coincident with our arrival they can strike in simultaneous blows. Hagab will be kept very busy in that case. This is my plan. What say you?"

NOGBA NODDED as though he were well-pleased with what he heard. Sitke frowned and Wayne waited for the small man to say something. But Hesta merely smiled and said to Wayne's questioning stare:

"He is a very conservative person by nature. He refuses to commit himself unless there is no other way."

"Mistakes are seldom made if one is conservative, my Queen," Sitke replied.

"And victories seldom won," she reminded him.

"I do not think of victory. I think only of defeat," he said. "Hagab is behind strong and high walls. He came prepared for a siege. We did not."

"The strongest wall is as weak as the smallest crack in it," she said. "We will seek the cracks. And we will find them. Nor will we need to climb the peaks, either, for the openings we need."

"What do you think, Wayne Kenrick?" Nogab suddenly said.

"I think Sitke has right on his side," Wayne said. Sitke flushed that someone took his side. It was an unexpected ally. Wayne went on: "But so has Her Highness. Now since both have points of equal effectiveness I suggest we strike a vote. What do you say, Nogab?"

"I say as Hesta says."

"Then it's up to me, eh?" Wayne asked. "Okay. To the City of Light, then...."

Sitke's face cleared on the instant. The die was cast and he was not the sort to carry dissension to uncomfortable lengths. As they wanted, so did he, in the final analysis.

"Very well!" Hesta said as she rose in a lithe gesture of her body. "Make ready our forces, Sitke. And you also, Nogab. Wayne Kenrick. Would you ride at my side?"

"To hell and back!" Wayne said.

"I do not know where hell is," the woman frowned in wonder.

"I only hope we don't find it," Wayne said. "It is a place of disagreeable odors and flame without end. Let us talk of more pleasant things. Yourself, for instance."

"But what is there to talk of me?" the woman asked in surprise. They came to where her meena was tethered and Wayne gave her a foot into the saddle and mounted his own meena.

"Well," Wayne went on as they cantered down the narrow shelf leading down to the valley floor, "you're Queen. But who's King?"

Her cheeks dimpled in a smile. "My father was King. I was his first and only born. So I became Queen. There is no King...as yet."

Wayne glowed until she came to the end. Then he frowned. "How do you mean, as yet? Do you have someone in mind?"

A faint light of annoyance showed in her eyes. "I don't know whether that concerns you," she said.

"I—I'm sorry!" Wayne said in apology. "I didn't mean to—to well, uh...." he stopped, afraid to go on.

"Come now, Wayne Kenrick," she said. "Let us speak of other things. The women of your world, for instance. Are they warriors, also? Pretty? Do you have a favorite among them?"

"To talk with, yes. To play games with, yes. To listen to, yes. But to love, no!"

"You have found none to love? A pity. You are handsome, brave, well-made. Why not?"

"Because I knew the right one would come along one day. So I've waited."

"And do you think she will come along?"

"Yes. I think she has, I mean *will*, come along," Wayne said.

She gave him a quick glance, turned aside and rode ahead a few paces. She did not want him to see her face or her eyes, for a little while. Not till she could recover her composure.

They observed a tortured silence for the balance of the ride, though each had in heart a something to say to the other. Then they were on the flatland and all thoughts on what had been said went by the board. Nogab

and Sitke were already there, awaiting them.

THE LONG lines of mounted bowmen sat their meenas as if they were carved of stone. Not a muscle quivered as they awaited the signal for the start.

"All are in readiness?" Hesta asked.

"All," Sitke replied.

"Then we march," Hesta said, as she gave the heel to her mount. Sitke, Nogab and Wayne rode at her side. And as they galloped, Hesta gave the details of what was in her mind:

"....We will camp in the hills until the night is on us in full. In the meantime the messengers can be sent into the city to warn those within of our coming. There is a reason for our camping in the hills until the night is well gone. To begin with, we will not arrive until the greater part of evening has passed. Then, too, a third of our forces, under Sitke, will ride to a spot opposite from us. As we strike from our end they will strike from theirs. It will be a two-pronged attack. Hagab will be panic-stricken."

"I hope," Wayne said under his breath. She did not hear him, for she went on: "My bowmen need only enough light to see their targets."

"And my swordsmen only enough to use the steel," Nogab said.

Only Sitke said nothing. It was too late for warnings, he thought. May the Gods be with Her!

The large pale moon was on its way to the place from which it came when they arrived at a spot Hesta thought suitable for the dispersal of her forces. Not too far off the City of Light shone in the fading moonlight. Here and there a fire still burned but for the most part the city looked dead.

Nogab kept pacing back and forth like some wild beast, as he would look fiercely toward the city now and then. Wayne understood the man's feelings. Hesta and Sitke had gone into a huddle the instant they arrived at the spot which Hesta had chosen from a distance. Wayne waited until Nogab had regained some control over himself.

"Easy, my friend," Wayne said gently. He liked this big character who towered over him. "It won't be long."

"I have but one hope," Nogab said as he turned to Wayne. "Let me be the one to face Hagab. I don't care who gets the others. Hagab is mine!"

"I'll try to arrange it," Wayne said. "Although I'd like a crack at him, too. I still don't know what's with Roger and Lydia."

"Nogab! Wayne Kenrick," Sitke called to them from the shadows. Hesta stood at his side, her breast-plate gleaming in the moonlight.

The two stepped to their side.

"We ride very shortly," Hesta said. "Sitke goes now with his men to the other side. It will not take him long. We will attack first. The moon is fading and soon the sun will be up. We need the first grey light. Let us mount."

Hesta rode her restive meena until the last of Sitke's men rode by. She waited until the last of their hoofbeats died in the distance, then gave the signal for her men to advance.

The battle was soon to be joined.

"DO YOU RIDE at my side, Wayne Kenrick?" Hesta asked.

"Until the end, my love," Wayne said simply. It was the most unaffected thing he had ever said.

She gave him a small smile, but said nothing. There was no need to.

Her eyes told him all he wanted to know.

The grassland gave silent reply to the pounding hoofbeats. The thousands of warriors, Hesta's and Nogab's, rode until the mists of the predawn broke and disappeared in the first grey light. Then the high walls of the City of Light were clear to be seen and not too far off. And Hesta rose in her stirrups and waved the bright blade in her hand in a wild gesture, and from the thousands of throats burst a concerted roar of fury.

Then dimly to their ears came an answering roar of voices. The men and women within the city had risen and joined battle with Hagab's painted warriors. And now the walls were almost at hand. Hesta turned in the saddle as they rode together and said:

"Stay close to me, my King!"

"Until the end," Wayne said, as he followed her into the shadow of the gate ahead....

Until the end, Roger thought, Always until the end. And now it was soon to be. Hagab sat upon his throne and looked bemusedly down at the man and woman held firmly by four guards.

"I am angry," he said in his petulant voice. "I dislike being angry! I do things which hurt.... Because of you strangers from another world my Grand Priest was killed. In your defense, too, I hear. My painted children sometimes get out of hand. It is even difficult for me to control them at times. For example, if I were to say, tear these two to bits, they would carry out my order to the letter. Such a mess it would make."

"But I will not give such an order! No indeed! I must think of a more exquisite and enduring form of torture for such troublesome beings....".

Roger sent Lydia a message with his eyes. Don't give up hope were the words his brain used. But she was not looking at him. She hung like a limp rag-doll from the arms of the two guards. Her eyes were wide open and she was alive. But she seemed in a sort of coma. Roger felt grateful that she was not aware of the painted monster's words. If only she remained in that state until it was all over.

Roger was not a fighting man. But his entire being had cried out for some sort of weapon as the painted beings swarmed over them. It was torture wishing for the smallest blade even though having it might mean nothing. At least, he felt, he would be striking a blow in their defense.

Then they were being dragged through the streets, the butt of all who saw them, spat upon, struck, kicked and the object of every foul phrase man could invent. They ran the gamut of the foulness of man all the way to the castle which once had been Nogab's.

There, the prisoners were forced to wait. Hagab was busy at something or other. Time dragged by endlessly. Roger could only call to Lydia to have courage. The guards would not let him go to her. The first time he had tried he had been beaten for his attempt.

FINALLY, Hagab had ordered them brought to him. The large room was the same. The charred remains of the few pieces of furniture were still scattered about. Hagab still sat on the too-large throne, and in the same position they had left him in. But now the vast room held a greater number of warriors than it had before. They were yelling at the tops of their voices, at each other, in groups, and in scattered fragments the length and

breadth of the enormous room.

Only Hagab was silent.

Then they were face to face with him and his petulant voice beat at them. Roger knew then that the Grand Priest had been their friend and had been the enemy of this mad being above them. Whatever the Master Plan the neuter had meant, Roger was certain it had to do with the fall of Hagab.

Suddenly the door at the far end of the room burst open and a warrior dashed through. He came running full speed forward, screaming as he ran:

"We are being attacked, Mighty King! The bowmen of Queen Hesta are attacking—!"

Hagab stiffened and sat straight up. His eyes rolled in his head and his mouth opened and closed several times before words came:

"Kill him! Kill him, I say!" he screeched.

Four blades found their marks at the monster's command and the dismembered body of the messenger rolled on the floor, torrents of blood pouring from it.

Hagab laughed loudly at the sight. Then his glance focused on the prisoners. A gleam of pleasure broke in their mad depths. Hagab had found the torture he would use. This man seemed so fond of his woman. Then what greater torture would be than to have her the toy of one and all while the man was forced to watch....

Hagab put the thought into words. Howls of laughter greeted them. Warriors leaped forward by the score. There were so many that some fought to tear her clothes from her. Roger wrestled and fought to get free but received beatings for his pain.

Then Lydia was stripped completely and held firmly by two guards.

"Hagab first," one of the warriors

shouted. "Let Hagab be the first."

"Aye," the others took up the chorus. "Hagab first."

Hagab laughed aloud and stood erect, the better to see the body of the woman. His mouth made a moue of satisfaction and after a second Hagab minced from his dais and stepped down among his warriors. They parted to let him through. He stood before the naked woman for a long interval, taking in every feature of the face and figure. Then he grinned insanely and held out his arms for them to begin disrobing him.

"Touch her," Roger howled through bloodied, split lips, "and I'll kill you! I'll cut you to bits, I'll tear your eyes out of your head with my fingers—" the words ended in a broken sob.

"Really?" Hagab turned for an instant to the other. "H'm. It gives me an idea. When we are done that is what I shall have done to you. In pity. So that you will not have to look on her again. But, we must first to our pleasure—" He turned again and lifted his arms once more.

BUT WHAT Hagab had in mind never took place. Suddenly there were shouting voices at the door, the ring of steel against steel, and the door burst open again, this time to let a mob of struggling, fighting men through. Those near the door shouted warning. And in an instant Hagab was behind a wall of warriors who protected him as they retreated.

And on the floor, forgotten by her guards, the still and naked body of Lydia Sherman lay. A broken figure crawled to her and covered her nakedness with his own. Blood seeped in a steady stream from a deep wound high on the chest of Roger Sherman as he lay atop his wife. The last act of one of his guards had been to plunge the stabbing blade into

Roger's body...

They rode ten abreast straight for the gate. And as they neared it, it opened suddenly. Hesta, Nogab and Wayne rode straight through to be greeted by hundreds of the purple giants, men and women. Then the first ranks of bowmen were through and leaping from their saddles and Wayne saw for the first time why they were feared.

Their movements were swift as lightning. Less than a second passed between the pulling of the arrow from the quiver to the loosing of the slender shaft. Nor did they ever miss.

Nogab shouted orders to his people and they in turn told him where the painted warriors were to be found in large numbers. The moment Nogab heard that Hagab had taken possession of his castle he turned to Queen Hesta and said:

"I will take these with me. It will be enough. The rest are in your command. Wayne Kenrick! Your friends are still alive. Hagab has them prisoner."

Wayne looked first to Hesta, then to Nogab. He was torn between two loves. As if realizing what was in his mind, Hesta said:

"Go, my King. But return to me. Very well, Nogab! I will have my bowmen clear a path for you...." Her lips were stopped suddenly. By Wayne's own. She drew back after a second, looked deep into his eyes and bent forward again to receive another kiss.

Then Wayne and Nogab were racing down the narrow, twisting street toward the castle ahead.

Time after time the painted warriors tried to form a barrier and time after time the bowmen's arrows took their toll. The remnants of what were

left were easy prey to Nogab's people. Now the sun was up and the castle stood out in all its medieval grandeur.

"There is a short cut to the castle," Nogab said. "But we will be lost to sight from Hesta's archers."

"The short cut," Wayne said. "We'll risk it."

Nogab called for close formation and they turned off the street they were on, into a narrower, more twisting one. But if they had lost the cover of the bowmen, they had gained in another way. The street was so narrow the painted warriors could not get to them in the way they wished, to envelop them and break the force into small pieces to be chewed up by the greater number of Hagab's warriors.

Time after time Nogab led a wedge of giants into the thick of the fighting. The swords of the huge men made mincemeat of the others at close range. So step by step the way to the castle was cleared. Then the large space before the castle gate itself lay before them. And Nogab threw caution to the wind. Waving his sword for the rest of his small force to follow, he made at a lumbering run for the gate. And racing at his side, Wayne tried to match his stride to the giant's.

Then, from within, there came rushing out to meet them, howling at the tops of their voices, a large force of painted warriors. The two forces met head on and for a long moment the issue hung in the balance as they hacked wildly at each other. And once again Nogab and his people were not to be denied. The painted ones broke and raced in confusion for the protection of the interior.

Wayne, as wild-eyed as the rest, his sword dripping streams of blood,

climbed over the piled-up corpses and followed Nogab.

"This way," Nogab shouted as he turned sharply to the left and up an outside staircase. "This will lead us directly to the room next to the throne room."

His followers raced up the stairs after Wayne and Nogab. A plain door marked the entrance and Nogab shoved it open and piled through, not caring whether he was running into an ambush or not. This time luck was with him. Those inside had not yet been warned by the retreating force. One look and he saw that only a few men guarded the doors to the throne room. Nogab grinned broadly and held the door wide and the rest of his people ran through to engage the few guards.

A moment later they were hacking their way past those guards and into the throne room itself.

Wayne was the first to see the couple lying on the floor. He went wild with fury at sight of the nude body of Lydia Sherman. Although he did not know what had happened, he hazarded a guess. Sheer madness possessed him. His sword became a weapon of vengeance the likes of which had never been seen on all Wahoon.

IT LICKED, and tore, and slashed, and cut and chopped and pricked until it no longer gleamed. Blood does not shine except in sunlight. And the blade was covered with gore from hilt to tip. Not even the most insane of Hagab's followers had ever displayed the sheer savagery Wayne did. It was as if he were possessed by a mad demon which thirsted for yet never had enough of blood.

The rest were fired by Wayne's example. At the end he stood guard over the figures of his friends. Now and then he looked down at them,

trying to discover life in their still bodies. It wasn't until a path had been cleared for him that he was able to go to his knees and feel them. He looked up at Nogab who was standing above him.

"They're alive! Both of them! But Roger's in bad shape. She's just in a faint. Who can help him?"

"The blow was too high," Nogab said. "I can see it from here. Lucky for him it was a stabbing blade gave it to him. A sword tip would have spitted him. The women will take care of him. He's bled a lot, that's all."

Nogab's matter-of-fact voice calmed Wayne. He shook his head as several of the women rushed over at Nogab's command and carried Roger and his wife from the room. They'll take care of him, he thought. Nogab was his pal. He wouldn't let Roger and Lydia die. Not Nogab....

"We have the throne room, anyway," Nogab said as he looked about. "But Hagab escaped us."

He was right on both counts. Wayne followed Nogab to one of several windows and looked down at the town. It was a box seat to the drama below. Queen Hesta, her bowmen and those of Nogab's warriors who had stayed behind, were taking the town street by street, house by house. First the archers would clear a path, then the giant warriors would sweep in and storm the points.

"Roger. Roger," a voice called from the corner of the room to which the two had been taken.

Wayne ran over and knelt at Lydia's side. A cloth of some sort had been thrown over the girl to hide her nakedness. She kept looking to the woman who knelt over Roger, hiding him from view with her huge bulk. Now and then a low moan could be heard.

"He'll be all right, Lydia," Wayne assured her. "Take it easy, kid. The game's won."

"Roger. Roger," she moaned. "Don't go away. Stay, my lover."

Wayne fought down the sudden lump which formed in his throat. She sounded like a child crying for its mother when it was badly hurt.

"Please, Lydia," he begged. "Roger will be all right. Come out of it."

She looked dazedly up at him. And suddenly her eyes were in focus and sane again. She took a couple of deep breaths and motioned for him to step aside.

"I'm all right now. Please. Let me go to him."

Wayne nodded and helped her to her feet. They heard Roger call just as they reached the woman's side: "Lydia. Are you all right, dear? Answer me."

"I'm here, darling," Lydia threw herself to her knees and cradled his head in her arms. "Just you be all right."

Roger looked past his wife's shoulder, threw Wayne a tired wink and smile, and patted his wife's midnight hair.

Wayne knew then that both Roger and Lydia were all right. Whatever the giantess was doing was the best thing. He turned away from them and walked back to Nogab. The giant was staring out of the window again.

"Anything wrong?" Wayne asked.

"Yes. Sitke should have been here by now," Nogab said. "Hagab will escape us, or worse, turn the tables if he gets to the main body of his troops. Look. You can see the edge of their camp out there."

WAYNE FOLLOWED the pointing line of the finger and saw what Nogab meant. If the mad King reached the camp he could attack

and with a good chance of winning. Unless Sitke showed up soon Hagab would break through.

"Aah! The devil!" Nogab burst out in fury.

Wayne growled deep in his throat. He saw what the other had seen. Hagab, with several hundred of his followers, racing toward the camp a short distance off.

"We'd best get out of the castle," Nogab said. "They will try to set it afire with flame catapults."

But Wayne wore a puzzled frown. "Is it raining?" he asked foolishly.

Nogab shot a quick glance through the window. The sun was beating down with its rather pale light. Not a cloud marred the blue of the sky. Then Nogab narrowed his eyes for better vision and saw to what Wayne had reference. They did look like rain. But what Wayne had actually seen was a veritable hail of metal arrows streaking earthward and shooting lances of light from the shafts in the sunlight. From a distance they gave the appearance of a fine rain spray.

"Sitke! He has come. What a smart one he is. He saw the camp and is tearing it to bits," Nogab shouted in glee. "Now I see... By the Gods!" Nogab's voice changed. It was filled with amazement.

Now Wayne peered through narrowed eyes. He too saw what Nogab could not believe. Long lines of mounted warriors were charging in serried ranks along the entire front of greensward. Wayne could even make out the color of the men. Blue. Blue giants.

Leading the charge was a man smaller than his fellows, but leaner, with an appearance of inner strength. Rebak. It was Rebak.

Then Nogab gave voice to an exclamation and turned and raced from

the room. Wayne was but a pace behind. He had also seen the small column of men streaming back toward the wall which almost faced the castle. Nogab was shouting orders as he ran down the corridor toward the rear of the castle. Men joined the race until fully a hundred of them were in wild chase.

Hagab and his followers reached the breach first. They came streaming through just as Nogab and the others came racing around the inner wall to meet them. One look and Wayne knew Nogab's men didn't stand a chance. There were fully a thousand of the painted warriors. But if Wayne did not think Nogab could win, the purple giant had other thoughts. Voicing his battle cry, Nogab charged upon the larger force. Voicing a silent prayer, Wayne followed.

Even Nogab stopped at what happened. The painted men were falling on all sides, their bodies pierced by the shafts of six-foot-long arrows. Then the two men looked up at the ramparts of the outer wall and saw what had happened. Queen Hesta had seen early that who held the walls held the city. So from the very start she had directed the swordsmen to clear a way so that her archers could get up the walls. Now she had gained her objective.

"Don't forget!" Nogab shouted as he leaped forward again. "The painted idiot King is mine."

"Unless I get to him first," Wayne shouted.

But neither was to get to him. Suddenly the painted men formed an immense circle about the King. Their voice rose in a last shrieking. Then the circle narrowed sharply and swiftly. And as they came together at the very hub, they dealt each other death blows. Those who were left plunged their blades into their own

hearts. It was the largest mass suicide Wayne had ever seen or imagined.

THEY COUNTED fifty-four stab wounds in the body of Hagab when they reached him.

Even the huge figure of Nogab sagged as the two men walked back to the room they had quitted a short time before. Wayne felt as if every bone and nerve and muscle in his body was crying for rest and sleep. Yet, at sight of the figure who stood on the threshold of the door, Wayne forgot his aches and tiredness.

Hesta looked up into the drawn features of the man she called King, and stroked the lined cheeks. Wayne kissed the finger tips as they brushed against his unshaven skin.

"I said I'd be here, my Queen," he whispered. "It's going to be awful hard to get rid of me now."

She smiled, suddenly shy, and said: "Your friends? They were safe and well?"

"Safe, yes. Well, no. But I think all they need is rest."

"Good, for now I will have an excuse to bring you to my people and let them have a look at the new King. Is not that good?"

"Wonderful," Wayne grinned, and for a moment it was like the old Wayne Kenrick. Then Roger's voice was heard and he brought Hesta to Roger Sherman and Lydia.

Roger shook his head weakly when Wayne told him of Hesta's suggestion. But Lydia smiled and whispered something to her husband. The smile died at his reply.

"Wayne," she said gently. "Roger says he has figured out the time element and the mistake he made. If we can be brought to the spot where we were found he says we can surely get back."

Rebak! Rebak would know, Wayne thought. Yes. It would not be too hard, if Roger spoke the truth. And Wayne was willing to stake his life on it that Roger had found the key to the mystery.

"It can be done, Roger," Wayne said. "Remember this Rebak? Well, he will soon be here. He will bring us, you, back to that spot."

Hesta looked at him strangely.

Lydia saw the quick glance, reflected on the words Wayne had used and made her mind up to something. Patting her husband's hand, she got to her feet, pulled the cloth firmly about her and stepped forward until she was facing the man and woman.

"I can see it in your faces," she said. "You are in love with each other. So Wayne found the right woman after all. And she is a Queen. But why not? He is a King among men, a King among friends, a King among companions. A King who will sacrifice everything to help another. He is the stuff of which Kings are made. Stay, Wayne. Stay and be happy forever."

"Wayne has told me in sketchy detail what happened to the three of you and how you got to this world of constant war," Hesta said in deliberative tone. "Ask your husband if a fourth can go back?"

"Hesta!" Wayne shouted. "No! You can't do it. Why—why—"

"Why what?" the woman asked. "Is it not the Queen's duty to stand by the side of her King? Here, you would be King in name only. In this world of yours you would be King in fact. To me, anyway. Besides, I am very tired of ruling. Sithe would make a finer King than I am a Queen. Ask your husband, please, Lydia."

"Yes," Roger's voice came to them

from where he was now propped in the giantess' lap. "Whoever is in the time-cleft will come back. Only the time is running short. Rebak must be quick about it."

THE MOUNTED cavalcade of riders and a dozen figures rode on. The desert waste lay all about. Six figures detached themselves from the others and rode to a spot designated by one.

"There," Rebak said, pointing to where the three had been found. "See The desert holds forever the shapes of things."

It was true. They could see the imprints of the three figures in the sand. Wayne felt moisture at the corners of his eyes as he gripped the huge paw of Nogab's in both of his.

"Man! How I'd love to take you along. But on Earth you'd just be a freak. Here, you are a Warlord, master of all you survey. May the Gods always go with you, Nogab, old pal!"

"And with you, dear friend, Wayne Kenrick," Nogab said in farewell.

Then Roger and Lydia and Wayne and Hesta joined hands and lay down again in the imprints they had left.

"I made a mistake," Roger said. "A mistake in time. Let not time mistake us now...."

The two giants watching shook their heads in disbelief. Suddenly a shimmering haze had come up and spread itself over the four figures. When the haze lifted, there was only the sand. Nor was there even an imprint to show where the spot had been....

THE END

ESP IS EVER WITH US

BY JON BARRY

EXTRA-SENSORY Perception, compacted to ESP, has been arousing a great deal of renewed interest after a somewhat dormant period during which the "experts" debunked the work of Dr. Rhine. Dr. Rhine, famed researcher at Duke University, has dedicated his time and experience to the accurate scientific analysis of phenomena which defy the laws of cause and effect. In particular Dr. Rhine has been interested in telepathy, and his work on this problem is known all over the world.

Dr. Rhine's basic thesis is this: there are para-psychological and mental phenomena which cannot be explained on the basis of ordinary information. Telepathy, for one thing, appears to occur without question. Prediction, susceptibility to sensing the presence of forthcoming events, is another. How to subject these matters to scientific analysis?

His methods are too well-known to repeat here. There were, and are, the familiar marked-cards experiments, in which sensitives attempt to visualize cards arranged in order in a deck. Records have been made of sensitives who have known that accidents would occur beforehand. If

these phenomena were rare, they would be of interest. The fact that they are surprisingly commonplace makes them doubly interesting.

At present there is no scientific explanation. But this much has been ascertained: psychic and sensory activities *do* take place. This is confirmed beyond all doubt. Rhine's work has been sufficiently objective to assure this. Even the most skeptical scientist cannot ignore the facts. Therefore he knows they exist, but that no so-called scientific explanation exists. It is the purpose of Rhine's work to discover whether any control can be exercised over these miraculous happenings. In particular, can telepathy or the transmission of intelligence through mental power be developed to the point where it could become a useful faculty? There is no easy answer, but there appears a high probability that it can be. Many a science-fiction story has used this thesis; but too few have considered that it is a "here-now" phenomenon, a thing which is happening. Para-psychology may some day become the world's most important and valuable science!

1ST. RUN

Wells was the world's greatest pitcher.
But he talked so much that even the ball
grew a pair of ears and stopped to listen



The ball seemed to be saying, "Take it easy, buster!"

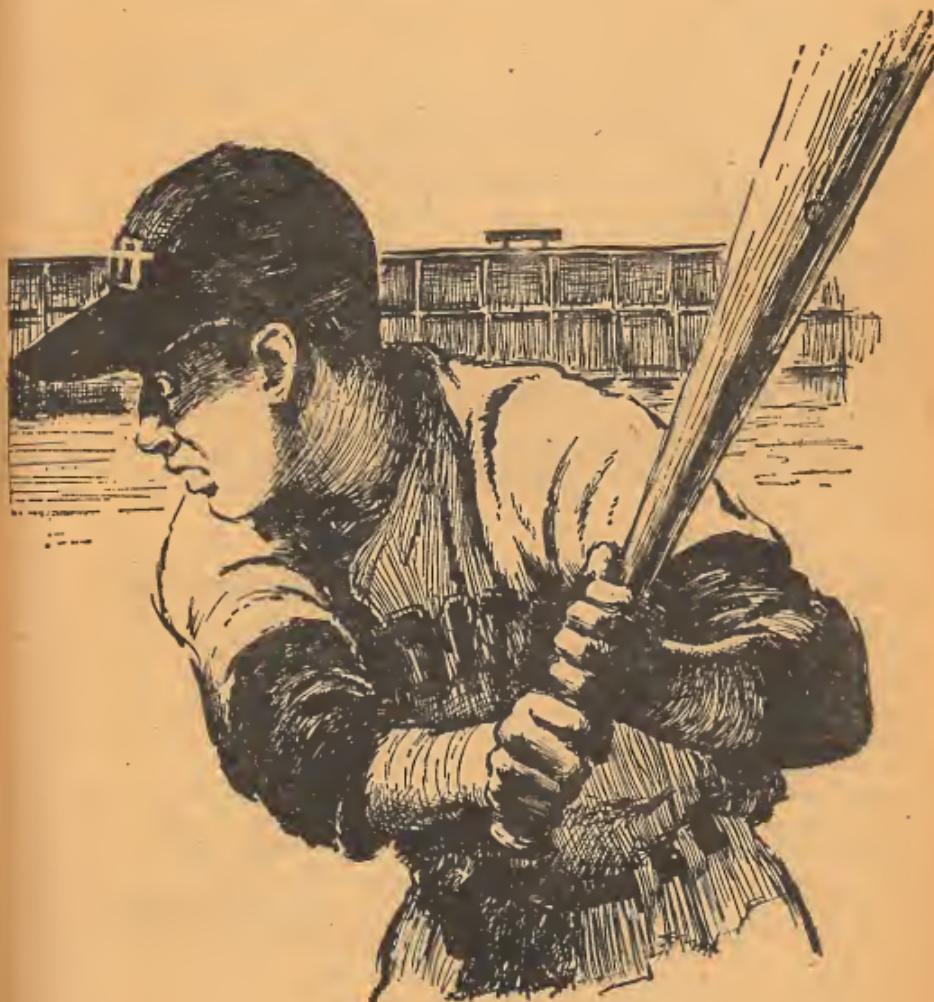
YOU SAY I don't act like a regular guard, or sound like one? Well, you're right. I'm not. Thanks for the beer, mister. Yeah, I'll have another. How come a place like the Johnsonia Museum hired me? Well, this is where the relics of our historical past are kept, ain't they?

That's why I'm here.

Okay, okay. Seein' as how I got you curious, I might as well tell you the story....

My name's Mac Heving. Mean anything to you? Oh, you do remember! Yeah, that's right, the Colorado City Atomics—World's Champions. But that was quite a while ago, before we licked the daylights out of the mystery planet, Alpha X. What brings that

By Mallory Storm



up? Why, that's the story!

Well, if you'd stop interrupting maybe I'd be able to tell the story. Only got an hour for lunch, you know....

It all started the week after the playoffs. One of the big tele-newspapers decided it would be a good deal if the fans'd pick an all-star team and send them out to play the best teams of all the other planets. Everybody fell in love with the idea but me. I'd managed all-star teams before on barnstorming trips and it's nothing but a headache from start to finish. And once my team won the title I was the unanimous choice for manager.

When all the ballots were in, twelve guys had been picked, the twelve best men in the baseball world. So the fans said. And for once they were right. Even I couldn't have picked a better eleven.

Yeah, I *did* say twelve. Only I wouldn't have picked Jackson Wells!

Anybody else.

What's right's right, though. Jackson Wells was the best damn pitcher ever played ball.

But not for me, no, sir!

Jackson Wells was the perfect pitcher. He hadn't lost a game in three seasons. Eighty-two games won over three years. And with a team that always finished in last place. The trouble was young Wells knew he was great, and what was more trouble, insisted on telling everyone about it. Every game he won, every pitch every move, had to be told in detail. And when he was through his big mouth'd twist in a grin and he'd lean that lanky body of his way back in a chair, cock an eyebrow at you and say:

"....Now wasn't that something?"

Well, that's all right some places and some times, but you can't sit in a clubhouse bull session and tell that to guys who are good as you in their

own positions. Not to guys like Mike Steel or Al Travis. They just don't go for guff like that.

But I'm way ahead of myself.

TROUBLE got its nose wet the first practice session.

Al Travis, my catcher, comes storming in the office right after practice, though it seemed early. I hadn't gone out to watch because I was working out the last details of our trip. I look up and all I needed was one look; when Al's burning his face gets beet-red-and his eyes seem to be wanting out, they pop so far.

"You c'n get another catcher!" he snarls.

"Now, Al," I kick a chair out for him, and motion toward the spittoon. "You know what happens when you get mad. You swallow your snuff and damn near choke."

"Well, I'm chokin' all right, but it ain't from swallowin' my snuff. That damned punk!"

Punk! What punk? Seems like there were several on the team. Turns out I was wrong. Just one.

Jackson Wells.

"You c'n get another catcher!" he reiterated. But this time in a lower tone. "Imagine that character not takin' a single signal? An' you know what he says when I call him on it? That he doesn't have to be told what to pitch, he already knows."

I run through everything I know about this Wells kid while I blow smoke out at Al, and think of all the high points. There were plenty. He went into ball-playing right after he got out of school. Funny thing about that was that he was such a whiz in whatever he took, mathematics and psychology. Turned down a government job as a psycho-technician. Right from the start he becomes a winning pitcher, and right from the start no

one likes him. Strictly no one.

That bad habit of his, telling you how good he is....

If only he wasn't?

But there wouldn't be a story then.

Now all the time I'm thinking about Wells, Al's sitting there without a fiddle and burning. Nothing for me to do but put the fire out. "What's the matter, Al, jealous?"

His brows meet over his nose. "How you mean, jealous?"

"That's the way I see it," I blow some more smoke, then take a second to study the two-inch length of ash on my cigar. "No question but the kid's great and from what I hear he's always given his own signals. I can't see anything wrong in that."

Al works the snuff around his lower lip, ducks his head and lets go a stream into the spittoon. When his head comes up it ain't so red. "You're right about that, Mac. He is terrific, but it's that darnel attitude. First day, and everybody hates his guts. Telling Mike Steel, best first sacker ever played ball, where to play on his pitches."

I gulp when I hear that. Mike Steel was damn near born with a mitt on his hand; he plays ball from instinct and it ain't necessary to tell him what to do at any time. Not only that but Mike's a swell guy and with a disposition I wish my wife'd have.

I couldn't help asking: "What happened?"

"Mike invited him back of the stands after the third inning."

"Third inning..." my voice cracked.

"That's when the game broke up. Halsted, Lane and Ito Hamoto walked off the field."

"Get that punk in here! Well, don't sit there on your fat prat! Get that...." I couldn't go on.

Al got up slowly, a big grin on his face. "Now don't get hot, Mac," he says as he moves to the door. "After all, the kid's great and...."

"Get outa here and bring Wells back!" I rave.

The door closes and I look down at my cigar. It's in shreds....

Wells is the sort of guy who doesn't sit in a chair. He gets his back down to where another part of him should be and reaches out toward the floor with the rest of him. He's so lanky, yet so well coordinated, that he moves like he was without joints. I let him sit for a couple of seconds while I get myself under control.

"Think you can talk without blowing your top?" Wells asks.

I'm under control. All I say is, "Why?"

"Look at your right hand."

My right hand's closed around a metal letter opener and I'm cutting notches in my desk. Funny thing, though. When I look up and see his grin, I got to grin too. There's something that's all of a sudden likable in it.

"Well," I say, "if you'd act like a human being maybe I wouldn't be ready for cuttin' out pap'r dolls."

"And only the first day," he remarks.

"The last day, too," I say.

The grin fades and his lean features work themselves into a thoughtful expression. "I know what you mean. Harmony. Without it the team may as well disband before the first inter-planetary game. I'll do my best, Mac."

"Try doing that," I suggest. "And while you're trying," I go on, "keep in mind that though you *may* be the best slinger in baseball, these other guys are the best in their positions. Know what I mean?"

"You mean about me shaking off signals and telling the boys where to play?"

"Yes."

He made a circle with two fingers. Then, "By the way, when do we play Alpha X?"

That threw me. What the hell did Alpha X have to do with this? "Why?"

He got up before answering and moved to the door. He opened it and stood there with his hand on the knob. "My bump of curiosity, I suppose. Four years ago it came into the planetary orbit, sent out a ship to all the planets and requested them not to land on their own, that they came in peace and wanted only to be left alone. And a year later we discover that their national game is baseball and that they seem to live for it."

He wasn't the only one with a bump of curiosity. Just about everyone in the Universe was nosy about Alpha X. But after Mars sent out a ship with some government representatives on it just to repay the call, and the *repulsion belt* was made public, no one else tried. Hell, they found out you couldn't get to within a couple of hundred thousand miles of the planet. When we got an invite from them to bring the ball team there it caused almost as much speculation and interest as what kind of team they'd have.

"We'll know in a couple of weeks," I said. "Right now all I'm interested in is us getting there. Keep that in mind, kid."

HE NODDED thoughtfully, pursed his lips as though he wanted to say something, then shook his head and closed the door behind him.

The first game was with the Mercury Giant Killers and I got to admit

it was about as sweet a game as ever we played. Wells pitched, of course, and after the third inning didn't allow a hit. It seemed after he pitched against any man he knew every weakness the man had. It was really something to see. The last nine men went down without even taking their bats off their shoulders. He was so good, in fact, the rest of the team could have gone in for their showers.

The second game was with Venus.

Trouble got its nose wet a second time then.

They had a left fielder who was really a power hitter and in the second inning he hit a ball a country mile. There was a man on and his homer meant two runs. For five innings those runs were all the scoring. But from the third inning on I noticed Wells was shaking off all of Al's signals and was moving the team around the way he wanted. I also noticed the boys was getting sour on that angle.

When we come in the first of the sixth I slide over to the kid. "How's it going?"

He squints out over the sun-drenched field and I notice he pays particular attention to their left fielder. "That boy likes them low and inside," he says.

"Yeah," I say. "I notice how he hit the one you gave."

"The one Al told me to throw, you mean," Wells answers.

"Is that what's stickin' in your craw?"

"Well... Listen, Mac! I think I've got this team solved. Let me run the game from here on, huh?"

"You could have asked me that the first inning," I says. "How come you waited so long?"

HE GIVES me a quick look and the red creeps up his neck and

along his jaw and cheeks. Then his eyes are narrowed against the hot Venusian sun and he's looking away again.

"Aw, g'wan, Mac," Halsted's husky growl sounded to my left. "Let the genius show how good he is. What the hell! He's been tryin' to run the team for the past three innings anyhow."

"If you'd mind your ball game like you mind my business," I tell him, "you'd be batting a thousand."

Halsted's yap opens like he wants to say something. Then it closes so hard there's an edge of white around it. But my quick rebuttal hadn't served the need. I'd only put oil to flaming waters. Before I could say anything else it was too late. Ito Hamoto had gone down swinging against the slants of the beanpole pitcher they had and we were on the field again.

"Let Al call 'em," I tell Wells as he swings off the bench.

Well, Al called 'em.

We lost that game, eight to one; they scored three runs in the eighth and three in the ninth.

The next game was supposed to be the toughest. Mars always put a good team up against us. This team was no exception, and like all Martian teams, there were terrific field and no hit players. Not only that but now they knew we were vulnerable. The game on Venus had been cosmi-cast and the whole system knew we had lost and how. The sportscasters had caught on fast, and now the feud between Wells and the rest of the all-stars was public property.

I knew what we were in for when I saw the hundred thousand seat stadium filled to overflowing and saw the huge mob milling outside. There's an awful lot of ribbing of Wells as the gang of us come through the gate, and

even more when the mob inside spot us. But what I don't like, and keep in mind for future reference, is the way the rest of the team walk deliberately apart from Wells, as if to say don't blame us, we think the same way you do....

There's a bright look in the kid's eyes and his mouth is twisted up in a tight grin, and I'm quick to note how his head's up and shoulders squared away, like he's walkin' in a stiff wind. Right away the newsreel men come running over. Usually it's, "Say something for the folks back home, Mac," or, "Gonna take these guys, Al?"

Only this time the whole gang of them are on Wells, and all of them shooting the questions thick and fast about how he feels and whether he's gonna run the team like he did on Venus and so on until I was ready to use a bat on the whole lot. It took me a couple of minutes to shag them off. And all the time the rest of the team think it's the best fun they've had, from the way they're laughing, and of course the crowd eats it up.

I'm eating it up only it's choking me.

Lucky thing our dugout's close by. I manage to get Wells away and down the steps before he loses his mind and starts telling what's on it. The rest of the boys follow us and I get them to the far side so I can be alone with Wells.

"This ain't no good, kid," I say.

HE'S NOT looking at me. "It's got to be!" his words are so low I barely hear him.

"Are you nuts?" I turn him so we're facing. "I'll call the whole trip off after this game and to hell with it! Now let's get something straight, Wells! I don't know what you're try-

ing to do, but if it's making a monkey outa me, you're doing all right. So I'm telling you right now, Watson's pitching the rest of the games."

"No!"

"Yeah. Now get on the bench and keep your lip buttoned."

"Wait, Mac. Please! You've got to listen and even if I can't tell you why, you've got to believe me when I say that I've got to pitch every game and call every signal...."

"You're nuts!" I break in. "The way the gang's feeling they'll walk off the field, or what'll be worse, play sandlot ball. No, and for another reason. Me! They'll laugh me outa the game, if they haven't already."

"I know what you're thinking and I know how you feel," the kid says. He's got me by the shoulders and his face is bent down to where his eyes are burning holes in mine. "But this is bigger than - anything you've dreamed. I've got to pitch every game, particularly the Alpha X game."

There it was again. Alpha X. Like the whole trip was made just to get to the mystery planet. I was getting fed up with all this mystery.

"Say, why don't you stop with this business about Alpha X. What're you trying to tell me, that all this big deal is just to get to that goofy place?"

"Mac, when did we start playing inter-planetary ball?"

"A hundred years ago," I say.

"And how many all-star teams have gone out to play?"

"Fifty, maybe sixty. Why?"

It's not something new, is it? Then why was this trip made with such a big splash? Why all the fuss? Why all the big talk in the newspapers about, and let me quote, "...There is no question but that this team is the greatest aggregation ever to play baseball on this or any planet. IT'S A MATTER OF PLANETARY PRIDE

THAT IT MAINTAINS THAT STATUS...."

"How do I know?" I ask. Now the kid's got me worried. "You know how them newsmen talk."

"The newsmen had nothing to do with this trip. It was all planned in Colorado City, in the Octagon Building, and long before it began. I'll tell you one thing more. The ship that came from Alpha X for its one and only visit went back with something on board, on the person of one of its men, that no one but a couple of Earthmen know about. And it's solely because of that *thing* that we are all here, and why I've got to play in every game."

"Now if you want to pitch Watson it's all right with me, but I've got to get in the last three innings."

I don't know why this guy wanted to play ball. With his line of chatter he was the best salesman I'd ever met. I was saying, "Yes," before he was quite done with his request. Or maybe I'd said yes because I just wanted him to shut up. But yes it was and yes it remained. By the time the sixth inning rolled around it didn't seem to make any difference any more.

It was only two to nothing at the end of that inning...their favor.

BUT FROM where I was seeing the game it was as safe as twenty to nothing. Watson had been lucky for five innings but his luck died in the sixth. My boys, the all-star *shooks*, were playing like they'd never played ball—any kind—before. The fortunate thing was that our Martian hosts were no-hit players. At least not in the pinch. Five times they had men on and five times we somehow managed to hold them from scoring. But, as I say, they caught up with us in the sixth.

I don't know what it was, the crowd,

all of whom were rabid home fans, the dozens of newsreel cameras, the tension on their own feelings; I couldn't say any one of these reasons were responsible. Probably all of them. But in the Martian half of the sixth my boys fell apart.

The first man up, their shortstop, a guy who'd struck out twice before, rapped a solid single past Mike Steel. I used my choicest language on Al Travis for letting Watson throw a sucker pitch, a low, outside ball. The shortstop had gone down swinging on high inside balls. Why Al called it the way he did was a mystery. The next man up fouled out to Al.

One down and one on.

I started to breath easier.

But not for long. The next guy up gets one at the end of his bat and sends a slow roller straight to Mike Steel. A kid could have handled it. Unfortunately Mike hadn't time to shed his years. He stumbled around after it like a day-old colt after the milk bottle and by the time he got his hands on it both men were safe. And now it was two on and one away....

Watson took care of the next guy. He shook off three straight calls Al gave and just threw power pitches. Three pitches, three swings and it was two away.

Now in a spot like that there are the obvious things and the deep-strategy stuff. The Martian head bench jockey played the obvious, a double-steal. The whole team caught the signal. Al called for a fast one high and outside, Lane and Jergens swung in behind their bags and the outfield came in fast to cover. Watson threw a perfect pitch right where Al called it.

The rest is the sort of waking nightmare no ball manager ever wants to have happen to *him*. Here's a team

of damn near perfect ball players, and suddenly they're committing every sin possible. The minute Watson threw the pitch-out the runners went down in a double-steal. Then everything went wrong. There were infielders dropping throws, colliding with each other, one wild heave, and the grand climax.

Al Tarvis dropping a perfect peg to the plate to allow the second runner to score.

There was so much screaming from the stands I couldn't hear any other sound. But suddenly, like a knife slicing butter, Jack Wells' booming laugh made all the other sounds a background. He was standing on the top step looking out on the field and his wide mouth was stretched to the breaking point with laughter. Funny, but I don't remember gettin' there. All that's clear is that I've whirled him to me and I'm shooting a right at the lean jaw up above me.

Only it doesn't get there.

I didn't see his left hand come up but suddenly his big paw is wrapped around my fist and now he's got a tight grin splitting his mouth.

"Easy, Mac," his words come in a slow drawl. He bends my hand down until it's at my side while he brings me close to him with his free hand. "Slugging me won't make it easier."

"I'd love it," I try to match his tone. "Just one poke, Jack. Just one...."

HE HEARD the sound of pounding feet before I did.

His head whipped to the side, then he shoved me aside, and he was up the top step and moving in to meet Mike Steel. And behind Mike, but five yards behind, were most of the team. I didn't have to see their eyes to know the same kind of bloody rage would be found in theirs.

Once more I found out I wasn't an athlete.

I got there too late. Jack Wells was stretched on the ground and Mike was sort of bending over him and was saying: "C'mon, get up! That wasn't a hard one."

Wells' lips were skinned back in a queer kind of grin but nobody'd have labeled him "laughing boy".

I was first man up at his shennigan, and the only man to bat, it seemed. The rest of the team wasn't interested in breaking it up. In fact they looked like nothing would have made them happier than to have Mike finish off what he started. The only bright cloud in the storm sky was Mike's willingness to call it quits because suddenly he looked ashamed. The reason was made plain to me.

"He's a rat, a yellow one, but I can't keep hitting him, Mac," Mike mumbled. "He won't fight back."

By this time everyone was there including the four-handed bat boy on the Mars side. The umps had me surrounded and their mouths were going like an atomic blast gun, demanding explanations, calling shame on me, demanding the game be called—the game go on—the game be forfeited. I managed to shoo them off, get my boys back on the field after telling them they'd better get that last man out, and finally got to Wells.

He had a bruised cheek where Mike's heavy fist had connected. By morning it would look like hell. I didn't know what the morning would show on me. Right now I felt inside like my ace pitcher looked, pretty battered.

"Happy, now, genius?" I rubbed the salt in as I thumbed him back to the dugout.

"I will be when I pitch the last three innings."

I had to hand it to him. He loved that medicine.

"Oh," I said. "So you ain't through making trouble yet?"

"I said I have to pitch the Alpha X game," he said.

"What makes you think I'd let a character like you even step on the mound? The team'd walk off the second you'd start up there."

"Who cares? All I want is a catcher."

"Now I understand how come your team wound up in the cellar. With just you and the catcher working the games you pitched things got rough on pop-ups over the infield," I said.

"You're forgetting," he said, "that I didn't lose a single game over three years." Funny, but he didn't sound sarcastic. He was just stating a fact.

I stated one, too, then: "I ain't forgettin' nothing! Like your promise to do right. And what about the *harmony* you said you'd get into. Remember that day in my office?"

"I remember, you don't," he said. "I didn't promise anything. I just said a team has to have it and I said I'd try to do what I had to. If you put words in your mind I didn't say, that isn't my fault."

"Well," I gave it to him all the way, "I'm telling you in plain talk, so you'll understand, that not only are you *not* pitching any more on this trip, but I'll personally see to it when we get back, that you'll *never* pitch again. Smoke that stuff, *genius*." They even had me calling him that now.

HE HAD THE look of a man who'd never smile again. And when he opened his kisser the words came out in an icy shower: "Do that and I'll tell the newsmen *why* you acted like you did. It won't make good lis-

tening. Believe me, it won't."

"You never were separated from the boys, were you?" I asked. "Kid stuff. If I can't play I'll tell teacher. Get outa my sight, you punk, before I go on from where Mike left off."

"Mac Heving and the all-star team jealous of their pitcher, because he's the reason for their winning games," somehow Wells' words came out in quotes. "Wells proved he had the stuff in the Mercury game when he went all the way, calling his own signals."

More quotes. And I couldn't deny these. It looked like the barrel was made right for my figure. But I sure hated to ride it. The sigh I heaved came from so deep in me my shoes came undone. I turned my face from Wells and got sicker. There were men trotting down from second to third and from first to second and from home to first. And once more the wild, screaming beat at me from the stands. For the first time since the game began I forgot Wells and our troubles. I was beating it down to the chief ump, hollering for a time out....

Everything was just fine. All Watson had done was walk the first three men to face him since play started again!

Al Travis met me half way to the batter's box. Sweat cut twin streaks of grey dust down his jowly cheeks. His eyes were bloodshot with tiredness. "Watson's gone, Mac," he broke the news hoarsely.

"I ain't blind," I said. "It can't be helped, Al. I've got to put Wells in."

"The boys'll walk off the field," he gave it to me straight.

"It'll be the last time they do," I warned. "I'll take care of Jack Wells when we get back, Al. My word on that! That bucko'll never play organ-

ized ball again. He tried to blackmail me a minute ago."

That was something I should have kept hush about. I saw it in Al's face that he was saving that information for a future when he and Jack Wells would be alone. Behind some alley or other. But I had other and more important worries. They had two runs on us and the bags loaded, but there were also two away.

It was strictly Wells' play from here in.

It was like cutting my own throat but baseball's everything in life to me and I couldn't throw the game down. I turned and gave Watson the call-in. Wells was already striding toward the mound before my hand came up for him.

As he passed me he said, "Hold that time-out for a couple of seconds, Mac. I want to talk to the boys."

Of course I didn't hear what he told them. I had to get that from Halsted after the game, and that character had a memory like a three-year-old. It seems he called them a lot of sand-lotters, yellow, and just plain jealous because he was the only real star on the team and they knew it. The pay-off was when he mocked them and said they could slug him and forfeit the game, if that was what they wanted.

It wasn't what they wanted. At least not then.

THAT WAS the famous record-breaking game, the game where six men in a row hit homers. *Our* boys. Wells struck out the next batter and also the nine who followed. We won eighteen to two, strictly on sheer power hitting.

Of course he had to spoil it. His big mouth. As usual. Fact is I got to wondering why he wore shoes alto-

gether. He put his feet in his mouth so much he could have used his lips for feet covering.

The gang was roughhousing in the clubhouse after the game. I let them because I knew they were knocking the tension off. I looked around and saw the whole gang was there except Wells. Then he stepped into the locker room, got his jacket, and turned to go.

"Got to give the boy his rights," Al Travis said. "He sure can lay them in there."

I caught sight of big Mike Steel, his face flushed and one hand stuck out, stepping toward Wells. "I—I'm sorry about this afternoon, kid...." he was halfway through his apology when Wells cut him short.

"Save it!" Wells said. He faced the rest, who had suddenly stopped their roughhousing. "Big leaguers! Huh! Second-rate bush leaguers, more like it. Except when I'm telling you what to do."

There wasn't a knife sharp enough to cut the silence that followed.... I didn't even even hear the door slam behind him.

We were six hours out of Alpha X and I was getting my bags packed. The knock at my door didn't have the polite sound a steward makes. I yelled for whoever was there to come in and all three of them walk in. Al Travis, Mike Steel and Ed Lane. They're all wearing the same kind of expression, the kind that says, we-hate-to-do-this-but-we-have-to.

"Boss," Al's the spokesman. "We, uh, we..." he can't go on.

Funny thing, but ever notice how when the chips are down it's the big quiet guy who does the talking? Like Mike Steel. Plain talk, too.

"Mac, the boys made their minds up to something."

"Are you including Wells when

you say that?" I asked.

"He'll be part of the deal," Mike continues, "only he doesn't know it...yet. Wait," he cuts in before I could say anything. "We had a meeting a while ago, the whole gang. And we decided Wells can do anything he likes, call any signal he wants, shift us anywhere he pleases. But a run will score every inning he's in there. And if he gets too smart maybe a couple of runs. Mac, you know we can do it without anyone being the wiser, anyone but you, that is."

"So knowing you'd be caught at it by me you decide to tell me, huh?"

But they were past caring.

"We'll play our hearts out for Watson," Mike said. "You know that. And I don't have to tell you how we feel about you."

"Yeah! I'm listening to how much. Well, do what you want, but deal me out."

I supposed I should have called the game off by cosmi-wire then and there. I didn't, though. I guess I hated Jack Wells' guts as much as they did.

I thought I'd seen baseball-crazy places before but the city they flew us to after we cleared their main spaceport was the daffiest place ever. I'll bet there was ten million people watching the parade they held in our honor. Of course we went through the language-transposer on arrival so we understood them and they us. Hell! Half their language had to do with baseball. Anyway, they gave us a parade, then lunch, and after lunch they had two buses for the players and a special car for me, all for a tour of the wonders of their town.

WE WERE almost ready to go when I noticed that Jack Wells was just standing there. I called him over. "What's the matter, too proud?"

I asked. "What's your problem, Wells?"

"Too stuffy with those characters in there," he said. "Thought I'd ride with you."

"Come on," I said. "Hell! I ain't proud."

But if I wasn't too happy at having Wells' company the guy who was with me, was. This guy was really a big-shot. He was a little guy with a head three times the size it should be, and he knew more about baseball than any man I'd ever met. At least as far as records and stuff like that. He knew the batting and fielding average, not only of every man on our team, but also those of every man in inter-planetary ball. If only he didn't talk like a college professor. I was very happy that the little guy took a shine to Wells and aimed his talk at my pitcher.

I guess I dozed off because suddenly we were stopped and I heard the little guy saying, "...You simply must come up to Room of Trophies. I know it will interest you no end."

It was just a room in this big marble building. The room was not small by any means and it was overcrowded with glass cases in which were thousands of baseballs. I trailed after Wells and the little guy who hustled around the cases like a pro guide, talking all the time.

"Of course," I heard him say, "these are the collection of five thousand years of baseball. I don't imagine you have anything approaching this on Earth?"

Five thousand years! No wonder he knew so much about the game.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, and paused before a case at the rear. "The team who lost to the one to play your men." His outstretched arm invited our attention.

I didn't get it. There were nine

baseballs in the case. Nothing else. I stole a side glance at Wells and saw he was as puzzled as I. Then I looked at our little friend and felt a cold shiver whip through. There was something kind of goofy in the uplifted grin on his big face.

"You don't observe closely. Ah! Now you have seen."

I don't know about Wells, but I saw. There was a man's face on each of those balls. "Hey! That's pretty clever," I said. "Do we get ours on a ball if we lose? If we do I'd like to have an extra one to show the boys at the hotel."

"I'm afraid that would be an impossibility," the little man said gently. "Unless the people on Earth have two heads."

"Sometimes I think ball players have," I said. "And one of them's always asleep from the way they act. What's the gag, friend? What's with these picture-balls?"

Wells explained what I meant, in words the other could understand, words of four syllables. His mouth made a circle of appreciation, but I didn't hear any laughs.

"I hadn't thought of them as what you called them, picture-balls," he said. "An excellent description, however. They and their meaning will be explained tonight at the banquet we are holding in your honor."

I wanted to know more about it but kept shut at the look Wells shot at me. The little man sighed, turned and made for the door. His words floated at me from past his shoulder: "They were undefeated for a hundred and fifty games before they lost. But that's baseball, eh, my friend?"

I GULPED. A hundred and fifty games without losing. And we were playing the team that beat them. Ugh. I gulped again. I thought of the right answers later. All that came out then,

was, "Yeah." I was pretty confused.

Our headquarters was a fancy place out beyond the city limits. We had this place all to ourselves, and with it a dozen servants for our needs. Our little pal drove us straight to it after we left the building where the picture-balls were kept, and left us with a cheery smile and a few words about being sure to have a big appetite for the banquet that night.

Wells moved at my side until we reached my room. I had noticed we had arrived before the others; their busses were not in the driveway when we got there. I turned the knob and started into my room, then stopped as Wells asked:

"Mind if I come in, Mac? Something I'd like to discuss in private."

I continued to move after shaking my head for him to follow.

I tossed my hat at a chair, waved him to another, and fished a stogy from a pocket and lit up. He waited till I had it going good, then:

"You're going to pitch me, aren't you, Mac?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe—maybe not. Depends."

"If you're worried about those runs the boys are going to let score on me, stop...."

I guess my face gave me away. But he wasn't looking at me.

"...Al Travis told me what they decided. It won't make any difference."

I was curious. "No? How come?"

"I think I'll know the score tonight, at the banquet. Right now I'm just guessing. I think I have the answer, though."

"A *genius* like you and you only think you do? I'm surprised. But tell me; how come Al told you?"

"Because I had to tell Al who I am."

Whamo! There it was again. The

feeling I had from the beginning. And still I couldn't put my finger on it. Nor was Wells going to help. He was already opening the door, and before I could stop him it was too late. But at least I had someone else who could help me.

Al Travis.

I made a mental note to see him before the banquet that night. Only I didn't remember, what with one thing and another. And then it was too late. Our little friend was bowing and smiling at me from the open door and saying we had better hurry, it was not good form to be late.

So we hurried and we weren't late.

I've attended all kinds of banquets but none like this. There must have been ten thousand people in the place. Of course I was the guest of honor. But it was Jack Wells who got all the attention. He saw to that. He had managed to get a seat at my table, the one where all the big shots were at, and all during the meal he told us how good he was. But under it all there was the damndest feel to his words. It was as if he was also trying to make clear that he wasn't really a genius, except in pitching,

I FINALLY broke up his trumpet solo by asking no one in particular about the picture-balls. As usual our little friend had the answer.

"I did promise to tell you, didn't I? Now how shall I begin? Perhaps by making this clear, first. Baseball is not merely a game with us. It's a way of life, a road all of us must take at one time or another, for all of us must have played the game before we are considered men. Not only that but baseball is a contest of honor, and to lose a game in a contest such as the one which has recently ended, also means to lose one's head."

The words meant nothing for a

minute or two. Then they sank in, and the memory of the picture-balls returned. But that I couldn't believe.

He went on, and suddenly I detected the needle in his voice. It had been there all the time. I was just too wrapped up in me to notice it. "Those ridiculous claims your planet broadcast about this team; the greatest collection of ball players in the Universe. And the matter of planetary pride. In the Universe we left we were champions, and had been for five hundred years. Pride has reason for being in our case. But then you cannot know."

"No," Wells' deep voice broke in on us, "but we'd like to. The faces on those balls were real, weren't they?"

"And why not?" the little devil said. "It's less trouble to preserve the entire head, you know. By the way, those balls will be used in the game." He turned from Wells to me, lifted a corner of his thin lips in a smile, and went on: "After all, we as the home team must supply the balls. They are regulation weight and size and have been carefully judged so that they are exactly standard in bounce. You see the losing team in all important contests on Alpha X loses their heads to the winners, who use them in all games until they lose. Then they forfeit *their* heads."

I had to say something: "Well, I'm sure glad we're not playing your rules, friend."

"But you are, you know. Or have you forgotten them?"

How could I? I'd helped write them. Rule three, section eight, paragraph four: "The home team shall supply the balls which shall be standard in weight, size and shape, and shall have a uniformity in bounce...."

Jack Wells must have had the same thought I did. Only he wasn't afraid

to put it into words. "Am I right in assuming that should we lose it we would mean our heads as well as the game?"

"Correct."

"And should we win...?"

"An impossibility! However, should the impossibility be not so, you would have caused us to lose honor. In that case we would have no choice other than to..." he paused and his eyes got round and staring. "...declare war on Earth."

"Our heads, or the alternative, war with Alpha X," Wells said softly.

"Not quite. War with Earth. The difference is a matter of semantics, but nevertheless is so. You see, my Earth friend, I made it a deliberate point to show you our wondrous science this afternoon because I knew it made no difference; you are out of touch with Earth. The *repulsion belt* is on again."

I CUT IN: "What science? I didn't see any."

"No, you didn't, because you had the colossal courtesy to fall asleep. But discovering you were a boor it mattered not that you didn't see our wonders."

"You seem to think that we wouldn't stand a chance against Alpha X," Wells said.

"Neither in baseball nor war," came the reply. "I explained the principle of the *repulsion belt*. Sound. But sound instantly tuned to the substance of matter which strikes against it. An instant and matter becomes the finest of dust. And keep in mind that space is no hindrance. We can span the space between Earth and Alpha X in a matter of days. One blast of our sound machine rays and all substance of life disappears. A mere turn of the knob in one of our laboratories."

There was more talk, and more food and more speeches, but for me there was nothing except what I'd already heard. Our heads or the death of every human being and animal and bird on our planet. Every living being, the little devil had said. Whatever dream I'd fallen into was broken by Wells.

"Get Al Travis and we'll meet in your room when we get back," Wells said. "There's only one way out."

Al and I hadn't more than gotten into the room when Wells' knock sounded. I opened the door and let him in and knew that whatever he had seemed to be before he was no longer that now. The grin was gone and the wisenheimer attitude. This guy had a mission and it was going to be accomplished come hell or high water.

He motioned for us to sit down and I almost found myself saying, "Yes, sir," to him. He reached into the inside breast pocket of his jacket and pulled an envelope from it which he tossed to me.

"This is a fine-percentage breakdown of averages of the team up to this game. If they search your baggage and find this it will mean nothing to them. The minute you get back to Earth get this to General Omar Hadley at the Octagon Building in Colorado City. He will be expecting you.

"Mac, I'm a Security man. Al knows because I had to tell him. I'm going to have to have a catcher. Anyhow, my job was to find out what the *repulsion belt* was and what the intentions of these people were. We knew they were baseball-crazy and from the microphonetic attachment we placed on one of them we heard enough to make us wonder whether they came in peace or not. So all this was planned during the past three

years."

Now I knew the answer. And a hell of a lot of good it did me. "Yeah, that's great. But what about the game tomorrow?"

"I told Al what to do. He's going to tell the boys I made another grandstand play but this time went too far. He's going to say you were sick and tired of the whole deal and washed your hands of this game, and he's going to see to it that the team walks off the field before the first ball's thrown. Right, Al?"

I notice now that Al's face has got a greyish cast. But his chin is up and his mouth's a skinned bloodless line, "Right, Jack," he said. "All the way, no matter where."

"Good boy," Wells says.

"What good will the boys walking off do?" I wanted to know.

"The rules say so long as a pitcher and catcher are on the field a game must be played. I'll pitch and Al will catch. This is going to be a tie game...."

"Until...?"

HIS ANSWER was a simple one. "Until we lose, of course."

There was a little more than that, my friend. That was a *game!* There'll never be another like it. Twenty-nine innings without a score. And after every inning Wells coming in to make me write down the weakness of every man, the kind of pitching he had to do on every throw, and the signals Al had to give. I wrote as he dictated, and as he knew they would, they let me keep those notes after the game. Oh, yes, they let all of us go home. All but Travis and Jackson Wells. They lost the game and their heads also. The averages Wells gave me to write down passed inspection and wound up in the Octagon Building on General Hadley's desk. It developed

later that our little friend had allowed Wells to see the sound equipment, and even more, had shown him the plans. Wells had one of these photographic minds and the education and background to translate what he saw to terms we understood.

Why did the little guy do it? How do I know? Maybe he was so damn sure they couldn't lose it didn't make any difference? Maybe he judged all of us by me, and he thought I was stupid. Or what really might be the case, they were out to make war anyway but had to do it their way.

But when it came a year later we were ready, willing and more than able to handle them.

Why did Wells make such a jerk of himself?

I ASKED him that during the game. He had an answer. If it makes you happy that's okay with me. He said the gimmick they'd planted on one of the Alpha X characters mentioned a Room of Trophies and, once, something about how well a team looked in their case. Wells said he added

nothing and nothing together and got two answers out of it. One: they played for real chips and the losing team lost more than honor, and two: the *whole* team lost whatever it was they had to.

That's why he made himself such a jerk. He played it to the end not knowing what it would be. But he always had in mind about a catcher and pitcher being considered a team. Of course Al was a real hero.

You see, if Al hadn't caught Wells the game would have been forfeit. So? Then there wouldn't have been a story to tell or a head to show. Al Travis' head, of course.

What about Wells?

That's up on Alpha X, in the Room of Trophies. There's a sign under it that reads, "Were it not for this man, Jackson Wells, the greatest ball player who ever lived, a whole Universe would have been destroyed."

I think Jack Wells, wherever he is, must love that phrase, "...The greatest ball player who ever lived..." because now a whole Universe blows the trumpet only he could play....

THE END

MOTHER NATURE FIGHTS BACK

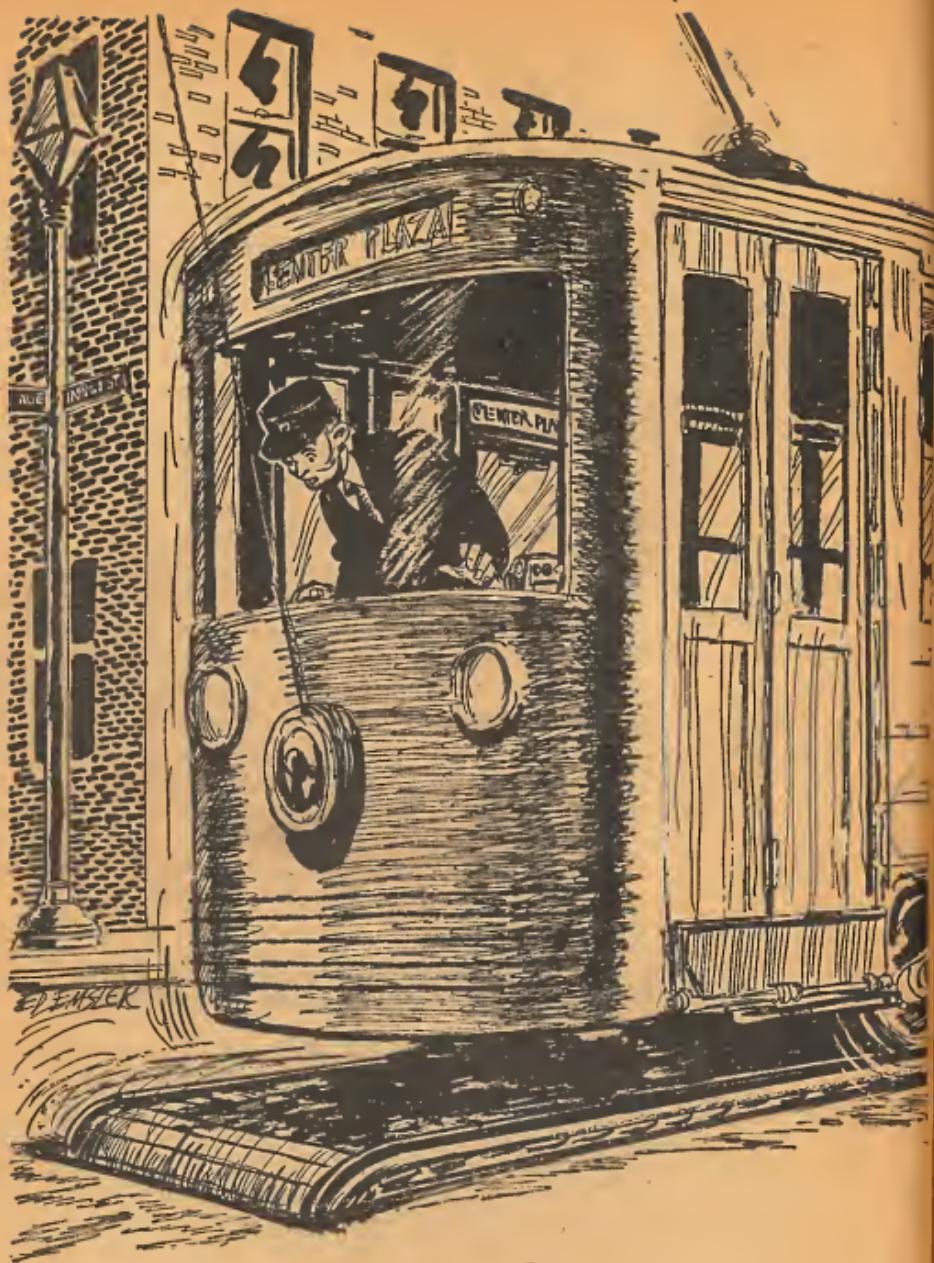
By JUNE LURIE

WHEN DDT was first announced and its spectacular achievements against insect pests recorded, science thought that at last it had conquered the menace of insect ravages. It is well known now, of course, that DDT was only a temporary measure and that Nature has shown that it can still adapt its living things to the worst that men can produce.

Enzymes within the bodies of insects, particularly flies, convert DDT to DDE, a harmless substance, and that is simply a case of perfect adaptation. It has been found that other miraculous substances are rendered equally ineffectual by natural substances within the bodies of creatures. Human beings, of course, share this faculty. It has been singularly disappointing for scientists to realize that, generally speaking, it is necessary to rely on work, on familiar chemical and sanitary pre-

cautions, in dealing with the insect world.

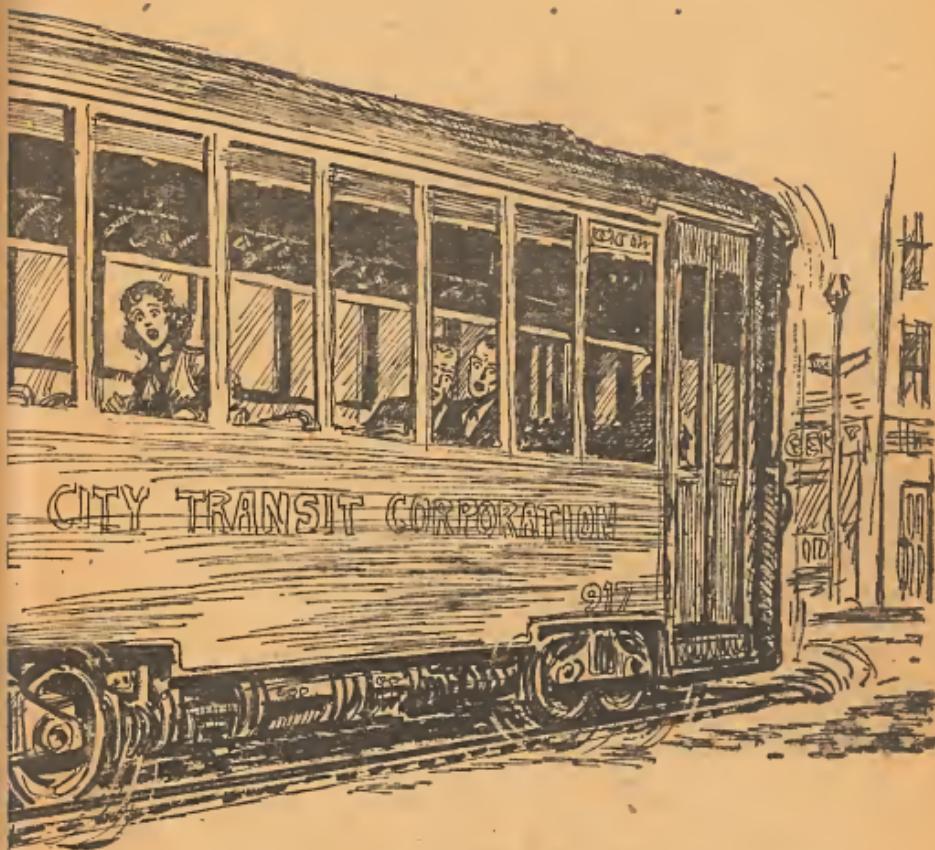
Many familiar chemicals, such as pyrethrum, are not neutralized by insect adaptation, but these chemicals generally require straight contact reactions, and must be applied carefully. The future of insect control appears to lie not in the field of organic chemistry but rather in killing devices, sonic fields, and similar esoteric by-products of the electronic laboratories which appear to be the future weapons against the insect ravager. The control and modification of Nature is rarely easy, and the chemists have begun to find this out. The question of whether the future will see a world rid of pests such as flies, mosquitos, and rats must be answered by a "yes". But the reason for it will be essentially physical and sanitary rather than chemical, which only a few years ago was thought to be the real answer.



The old streetcar had made the Division Street run for years. But on this day, the passengers alighted upon a strange corner of a city they did not know

MOON OF THE

TWELVE GODS



Number 917 was busy — going nowhere

BY ROBERT ARNETTE

RUN NO. 4765, on Madison Avenue, was the best run of West Division. A man worked but five hours and drew seven and a half hours' pay. When the runs came up on the board at "pick time", run No. 4765 was not on, and so the street car crews had chosen the runs according to seniority. It was then that John O'Halloran discovered he had forgot-

ten to put 4765 on the board—his first mistake in forty-five years with the Traction Company.

But John was West Division Super and so could not be censured by a mere motorman or conductor. Nevertheless, it was odd when Jimmy Flynn and old man MacIntosh came to pick they got the best run in West Division.

It was odd only till one discovered

it was John O'Halloran who was Jimmy's godfather, and that old man MacIntosh had been Jimmy's father's sidekick, as had been John O'Halloran. It all became quite clear then. But after a day or two the hard feelings left the crews who might have had a chance at it. For both young Jimmy and old man Mac were the sort of people against whom it is impossible to bear a grudge.

James Patrick Flynn spoke in the musical English known as a brogue, though he had been born on the north side of Chicago and had known no other clime or country until he served his hitch and a half in Cataclysm No. 2, as he called it. But Jimmy's parents had been born in the old country and the first words he had learned had been softly and litlingly accented and so Jimmy had presumed it was the way of words and loving the sounds had never left off using them.

Now he was a man grown, almost thirty years old, in his last year at law school and on the extra list with the street-car company. The government had subsidies for her veterans, but Jimmy felt a man had to look out for himself, and that a job being a job, the one which his father had prized above all else should be good enough for him. Especially when a man could save enough over the summer months to have a cushion for the days when an office would be needed. And how could a man do aught but save money when his work day began at midnight and ended at five in the morning, with eight hours' pay for it?

SO JIMMY FLYNN was smiling gently to himself as C.T.A. No. 4765 rolled down West Madison toward Clinton where the turn was made for the run back. His keen grey eyes kept a sharp lookout—Madison from Ashland to Clinton was tough at this hour, what with the boes a little grog-

gy from too much smoke and deciding to sleep on the tracks—and now and then some wild driver, underestimating the pick-up power of the street car, would attempt to beat it to a crossing. But for the most part it was an easy run and for certain Mac loved it, being able to sort of cat nap between fares, which were not too frequent from Ashland to the end of the run.

As a matter of fact the car was empty of passengers from Hoyne until Green when a man and girl, rather than woman, got on. Jimmy spotted them and for some reason was attracted to them. He kept looking at them in the mirror above his head forward a bit. They were, to tell the truth, as oddly unmatched a pair as ever had gotten on the car.

He heard Mac tell the man as he paid the fares that the car only went to Clinton and that they would have to transfer to a Downtown car at that point. The man shrugged his shoulders, took the transfers offered and found a seat at the girl's side close to the front of the car. He was dark-skinned, sullen-eyed, dressed in sport coat and slacks. His curling black hair was uncovered and shone oily-thick. There was something animal-like in his manner, in the way he walked, in the strange glint of his eyes, in the way his nostrils flared. All in all Jimmy couldn't understand what a girl like that would be doing with someone such as he.

For the girl was fair as her companion was dark. She was in blouse and skirt and her corn-yellow hair was almost covered by a picture hat. He could not make out the color of her eyes. But what he did see of her sent an odd coursing thrill through his veins. She was so lovely, so lissome, and her lips held a gay, small smile at the corners. Jimmy Flynn found it hard to keep his mind on his work.

Then he spotted the pair weaving

back and forth on the safety island at Peoria and applied the brake quickly to bring the car to a shuddering stop. The two drunks tried to get on the front platform but Jimmy waved them to the rear, smiling as he did so. Most of the drunks at this end of the line were easy to handle. They were rougher, drunker and tougher at the west end.

He could hear Mac's nasal tones admonishing the drunks to behave as they staggered forward to a pair of seats not far removed from the man and girl. And though they had been together they took separate seats. Each proceeded to fall asleep, head against the window pane.

Jimmy got the green light at Halsted and went on through without taking on a passenger. Another couple of blocks and the last turn back to the barn would be made. He pulled out the railroad watch his father had left him, saw he was right on the head and put the watch back in his pocket and looked ahead to the street....

SOMETHING was wrong. For just a second or two Jimmy couldn't quite understand. This was still Madison Ave and they were still riding the rails but it was as if—as if they were on a gigantic treadmill which had been set in the midst of a shimmering and translucent plane. The stores and houses seemed to waver and sway in this strange light which was and yet was not moonlight. There was also an odd feeling of torpor to his limbs and a heaviness in his lids. He wanted so badly to close them, yet he knew he was not sleepy....

And suddenly it was bright daylight and Jimmy let loose a startled gasp and slammed down hard on the brake lever. There was the sharp hissing sound of air escaping and the car ground to a stop in the midst of a wide

square. Yet Jimmy had the impression that the car hadn't been moving at all. He became aware too, of being the focus of many eyes. With that awareness came also the full realization of other things.

They were not in the midst of a plaza or square but rather in the center of a vast stadium, but one so large it was past belief. The tiers of seats extended upward and outward until the last was set in a haze of distance. Jimmy turned in his seat, felt the presence of Mac at his side, and saw that the stadium closed them in on all sides.

"Jimmy boy, what happened?" Mac wheezed hoarsely.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders, slipped out of his seat and stood straight, a tall man, well-proportioned lean, with intelligent eyes and straightforward glance. As if he felt that a situation had come about which needed the calming influence of a leader, he assumed that leadership without being asked to. The two bums were still deep in slumber. The dark-featured man with the lovely girl by his side was staring wide-eyed out of the window. The girl, too, looked stunned. And as Jimmy concentrated his gaze on her she turned to meet his glance. He smiled reassuringly at her and turned and flicked the door switch. The doors swung inward and a cool breeze swept into the streetcar.

"Well, folks," Jimmy spoke with mild unconcern. "Suppose we step outside and find out what this is all about...."

The dark man and girl followed Jimmy while Mac rustled up the two bums and shoved them after the others. The six people stood in a close group awaiting the arrival of a number of people approaching. Without being conscious of his action, Jimmy

had stepped close to the side of the girl.

"Looks like the official greeters are on their way," he said.

THE GIRL was silent, her face, after a second's turning toward Jimmy, swivelling back to her escort.

There were ten in the group, all men, as far as Jimmy could make out, though it was a guess at that. They were all of about the same height, perhaps an inch or so over four feet. They were dressed alike in what could have been called a toga, for want of a better name. Bare feet were encased in sandals and their completely nude, immense heads were bare also. Their faces were hairless and rather weak, an impression gained by the huge forehead and forepart of the head. They moved with a lassitude that extended even to the way their heads lolled on their thin necks.

Jimmy became aware of a vast sound rolling in on them from the massed tiers of seats. Yet though he turned for an instant to look at the nearest rows, he saw that those faces, which were of the same general appearance as those of the ten now almost at their sides, were blank, the mouths closed. Then from whom did the cheering come?

"....Oh, they're cheering, all right," said a voice close to his side. "You are hearing the sound because our minds are creating them and not our voice boxes...."

Jimmy turned quickly and looked down at the odd-looking creature by his side. There was something rather pleasant about the tiny person and Jimmy found himself grinning down at the man-woman.

"That's good!" Jimmy said. "I'm glad! Now suppose you tell us what they're cheering for, why, and how did we get here? And, also, where are

we....?"

"In a single answer," came the unspoken words, "or question by question?"

"Whichever is easier," Jimmy replied.

The little man shook his head turned to his fellows and after a second or so turned back to Jimmy. "We have decided that since you *did* come through the time-fault it is best we bring you to the city. After all you will be here for a considerable length of time. Eternity, probably. Therefore if you will be patient for a moment or so accommodations will be prepared for your stay...."

WHAT FOLLOWED until the six of them were secure in what the spokesman had termed 'accommodations', passed in a sort of dream. An odd vehicle, shaped much like a fat cigar, translucent as plastic, suddenly rolled out from an opening in the gigantic stadium. Without driver or visible means of locomotion it came to a stop where the ten and six people were standing and then the tiny men stepped within the transparent thing after Jimmy and the other five had found seats along the sides. And once more it moved, but this time straight up, and after a second or two it reached a height which would permit it to pass above the stadium top, in the direction of the tremendous city which appeared as a vision before them.

Metal and glass, globe and pyramid, square and cone, the skyscrapers rose, height on height, until one lost the tip in the blue of the cloudless sky. A warm sun-shone and performed miracles of color with the reflections shooting from the buildings. But that it was one of the most beautiful things Jimmy had ever seen he could not deny.

Straight for the city the cigar-shape

moved. And after a while scores of similar vehicles were observed also coming to the city. Then Jimmy noticed something else. All traffic moved at different levels. The spokesman of the group smiled as he said:

"The air lanes are graded and sectioned off for all traffic. Since we have highest priority we will travel without stop nor will we cross any intersections. Traffic will become much heavier within the city itself from street level and building level to building level. However, as I said before, our priority will bring us to our destination quickly...."

Their destination was an immense truncated cone. One second they were before it, the next they were within, the transition between in and out too swift to follow. They entered a tube-like affair, evidently the housing for their vehicle—others were also within and theirs was the last in line—and after a second the doors opened and the tiny men stepped out and motioned for the others to follow.

They stepped into what was to all purposes an operating theatre. It was just like it, except it held no operating bed. Instead there was a small platform on which they found themselves. The tiny man who had done all the talking motioned for the six to take seats along the rear of the platform as he stepped to the fore and addressed the assembled beings in the theatre beyond the footlights.

"Scientists of Rama! Our experiment proved a success, as you now see. The plane of the third cycle was penetrated and a number of inhabitants thereof and one of their means of locomotion brought to our plane...."

There was a modest spontaneity of cheering to which the speaker lifted his hand in admonition.

"....As you can see they appear to be quite normal beings, in a state

of advancement comparable to that undergone by ourselves some hundred thousand *menas* ago. Since it was impossible for ourselves to have a choice in the matter of transport—not being able to bring our corporeal selves to their plane—we will have to do the best we can with these...."

Once more there were cheering. But this time it was stopped by Jimmy, who stepped forward and smilingly held up his hand.

"Just a moment, scientists of Rama, whatever that is! I would like to ask some questions of you, questions I hope may be answered in all civility and consideration due us, since, as the gentleman said, we had no choice in the matter of our being brought here."

"And I'd like to ask some questions too; damn it!" said a thick voice suddenly from Jimmy's right.

JIMMY turned in startled surprise to see the dark-faced man in the sport jacket and slacks standing pugnaciously bent at the waist, a look of intense truculence on his dark features, his shoulders hunched slightly and right hand hooked slightly toward the opening of the jacket.

"Yeah! I wanna ask some questions. I don't like being highjacked. An' I don't like being made a monkey of see? I was gonna put the slug on some uh you guys back there in the stadium but somebody put the 'one-eye glimmer' on me an' stops me. But nobody stops me now, see?"

"Now take it easy, Jack," Jimmy said softly. "I think something nobody'll believe has happened to us...."

The other's face went demoniac in wild unrepressed fury. His hand went into the jacket opening and emerged with a .45 automatic. "Shut up, punk!" he snarled. "Nobody asked you to stick your nose in, see? So

keep it clean before 'Dirty' Mike wipes it...with this."

Oddly enough, the one who should have been concerned most with what was going on, seemed least concerned. The tiny man with the tremendous skull merely smiled and waited to see what was going to happen. It seemed as if the entire audience were holding its breath.

The smile on Jimmy's lips wore thin. His body seemed to go slack, his eyes narrowed slightly and one foot took a half step backward.

"You might hurt somebody with that," Jimmy said gently.

"Yeah! *You.... So shut up!*" Dirty Mike snarled.

Jimmy's shoulders heaved in a shrug. "So okay. You asked for it." His left foot slid forward some six inches, his right shoulder hunched slightly and his left hand shot out in a short hook straight to the button of the snarling man opposite. Only it didn't quite land.

Jimmy stared with ludicrous surprise at his fist. It was a bare inch from Dirty Mike's cheekbone. Yet he hadn't intended for it to freeze there. Sweat appeared on his brow as he strained to bring the fist to its goal. He couldn't move a muscle; neither any of his left hand or his right but also not a single one of his whole body.

"Violence," said the tiny man, "is something resorted to only by members of the animal world. Men live by cerebration. It is unthought of to us that men should attempt to settle matters by use of the fist or other violent means. This Dirty Mike had ideas of using the metal object to perform harm when first he stepped from the locomotor on which you arrived. We, of course, were aware of it and used our telepathic powers to prevent it. Should he persist in his

attempts we will be forced to take retaliatory means.

"They will not be pleasant. You may drop your arm, and as for you, Dirty Mike, remember and heed my warning."

There was stark fear in the sullen eyes of Mike Grozio. He licked at dry lips and swallowed hard as he slipped the .45 back in the shoulder holster. And without a word he went back to his seat. Nor did he even stir as one of the bums, still befuddled with the cheap whiskey still in him and the incredible happenings of the past while, leaned over and rested his shoulder against his.

ONLY JIMMY showed no fear. His mouth was still a straight line and anger burned bright in his grey eyes. "Now let's get to the bottom of all this!" he said sharply. "Somehow, I am sure, by one means or other, you managed to get us out of the time-plane we were on and into this. I imagine this world could be termed the world of the fourth dimension. Now what do you intend to do with us?"

"A reasonable question, and one, I assure you, which was thoroughly discussed," said the little man. "But first let me give the facts in the case and what brought all this about and what it has and will have to do with you, James Patrick Flynn, with your companion and conductor, Morgan MacIntosh; with the two inebriates, Jemmy Henderson and Lou Harsch; with Michael Grozio and the female Lois Phipps.

"Your assumption that this is a world of the, as you called it, fourth dimension was correct. But why the fourth dimension? Why not the fifth or the eight? Since you used the phrase you have more than just an idea of what you speak so I won't

give the matter in its entirety to you. Simply, we discovered a way of breaking through what lies on all planes a time fault. And by means we possess, brought here to this plane whatever was on the fault at the instant we came through. Since there is no way of telling the precise moment the fault appears there can obviously be no way of predicating your return. That is why I said but a short while ago that you may remain here in eternity.

"Therefore, knowing this, we asked ourselves, would it be fair and above-board to take from beings perhaps like ourselves, the pursuits of their livelihood, of their happiness, to break up their lives and install them on this plane, in completely foreign surroundings, and force them to live a life of our devising? Believe me, Jimmy, the matter of fitting all the answers into their proper niche was a difficult one.

"Now we here on Rama are in as exalted a state as is possible for beings to get. We live by intelligence. No longer do we work with our hands. Machines of incalculable and incredible complexity make our lives complete to the last detail. Food is non-essential, as is sex. We are ageless and could if we so desired live forever, thought it would serve no purpose. We are completely emotionless. Since death is *not* inevitable we have no need of religion. Since the past, the present and the future are wrapped in a single cocoon we worry not about yesterday, today, or the morrow. In a word, we are the *perfect* beings."

"*WHAT!!!!*" a new and hoarse voice shouted in horrified tones. "Lou! Did you hear that? They ain't got no yocky in this woild!"

"No yocky," wailed Lou Harsch the other bum. "Oh, no! Please mis-

ter! Please! Send us back to Madison Avenue."

"Now wait a minute, fellas," Jimmy turned to the two who had suddenly risen and were approaching with arms outstretched in supplication. "Wait a minute. He didn't say there was no whiskey here."

"But they are quite right, Jimmy," said the inhabitant of Rama. "There is no whiskey here."

AND, THOUGHT Jimmy, no food. Just how did they expect us to live, on air?

As though in answer to that question, as well as the one the bums wanted answered, came the reply, the most amazing thing Jimmy had ever heard:

"Therefore, to return to our decision in the matter of making things right for you here on Rama, we decided to manufacture the same sort of world you lived in. You will be the motorman, and MacIntosh will be your conductor; the two inebriates will be seated in the same position as they were on your arrival; and Grozio and the female will once more assume their positions, side by side. Life will continue as it had before. But the difference will lie in your being on Rama instead of the plane of your past."

"But that's impossible!" Jimmy burst out.

"Incredible is the word," said the other. "I said we had machines which could do the most fantastic things. Already one of those machines focused on you since the instant of your arrival, has extracted from your minds your entire pasts. Other machines, operating from that stimulus, have constructed a city exactly as the one from which we lifted you. There will be no difference in your lives, as they continue from this mo-

ment on. You will live them as you would have. And now...."

The tiny arms slipped from the sleeves of the toga-like garment and lifted on high, as though in benediction. A deep and wondrous silence fell on the assemblage. A silver-shot mist suddenly appeared and floated down from above. It covered everything and at last settled itself on the six Earthlings. And when it lifted and disappeared, the six were gone, gone as though they had never existed....

ONCE MORE Jimmy Flynn felt that odd torpor of his limbs, felt his eyes grow weary and heavy. And suddenly his eyes opened wide, the stupor he had fallen into for a second was gone, and he slammed on the brakes hard.

"Damn fool!" he muttered, as the car, which had suddenly appeared and swerved full in his path, skidded and crashed into a parked car, blocking the turn into Clinton completely. "Well, thank the Lord, we're at the end of the run."

The sudden braking of the streetcar threw the dark-skinned man forward against the seat in front. The girl beside him managed somehow to keep her balance. Both bums slid from their seats to the floor, while poor Mac wound up almost at the front end of the car.

"What the heck happened?" Mac's voice was stiff from shock.

"Some idiot thought he was on the speedway," Jimmy grunted as he slid from the seat and opened the doors. "Well. We're blocked. Might as well see what there is to be seen. I suppose we'll have to have the wagon come out."

He started to step down when he felt a tug at his sleeve.

"Hey, Jack!" a thick voice growled.

"Ye-ss?" Jimmy paused, one foot on the first step, the other still on the floor level. He saw it was the unsavory-looking man in the sports jacket. The girl was still seated, her eyes intent on the two of them. There was an odd look of repressed fear in those eyes.

"What's the idea? I thought we were goin' downtown?"

Jimmy pulled his sleeve free of the clutching fingers with a gentle pull. He was still smiling as he replied: "Nope. End of the line, right here."

"Now just a minute," broke in a thick hoarse voice.

The two men turned and looked at the two drunken bums who had suddenly, for reasons only drunks find, decided to have a voice in something. The taller one was evidently the spokesman, the smaller, his friend's echo.

"....I'm a paxtayer...taypayer.... I got my rights!" the tall one declaimed noisily.

"You're a taxpayer!" Jimmy said in surprised tones. He was glad in a way, for the interruption. He decidedly had no liking for the greasy-looking individual, and he knew words could lead to deeds, and for some reason Jimmy didn't want to fight, though he knew it might come to that. Therefore he continued: "You don't look like you could even pay the tax on tax."

"Oh, a wise guy, eh, Lou?" said the second of the two, his countenance suddenly lighting with truculence. "Just tell 'im who we are."

"Ya betcha, Jemmy," said the first. "That's what we'll do. Tell 'im who we are. Wha' ya mean, we don't pay taxes? Why Jemmy an' me have paid the whiskey taxes in a certain tavern on Madison Avenue for years. Ain't we, Jemmy?"

"Thash tellin' 'im, Lou," Jemmy

said. He seemed quite content with the role he was playing. He smiled softly to himself now and then repeated under his breath the same words again and again, as though liking their sounds: "Thash tellin' 'im...thash tellin' 'im...."

"All right, you guys!" Mac, who had come up to see what the excitement was, suddenly broke in. "Break it up. Let's go! We got things to do."

"Damn right there's things to do!" said the first, who had again faced Jimmy with bright angry eyes. "We got to get to Madishou Avenue."

"Say! Why don't you bums beat it?" the dark-faced man said, shoving at the one called Lou.

Lou went off balance and swung wildly about trying to grab at something which would reestablish it. His wild swing took his friend alongside the jaw and Jemmy, thinking Lou had been struck, lowered his head and butted Mac in the stomach. Mac went backward against the dark-faced man, who stumbled and fell down the two steps and into the street. Mac, off balance, continued his wild plunge and fell full on the other, breaking his fall. And Jimmy, to add to the confusion, grabbed both bums by their jacket collars and heaved them out into the street.

"Now beat it, you guys!" Jimmy called, laughter deep in his throat, after he saw that old Mac was okay. Then a voice behind him made him turn sharply.

"**FIGHTING!** Isn't there anything but fighting for a man to do? How I hate it!... Hate it....!"

IT WAS THE girl. She was standing almost at his shoulder and the light cologne she used seemed to lend a sweet aura of flower scent around her. Her eyes—amber in color he knew now—were flashing sparks; so bright were they. She was tense, drawn

up so that the sweet curves were taut now, blood-stirring, and her small hands were clenched in fists.

"It wasn't much of a fight, miss," Jimmy said mildly. "And I don't think anyone is hurt. Especially not your..." he hesitated for the barest instant and went on, "boy friend...."

"He isn't my boy friend," the girl said. "And I hate him most of all."

Jimmy's eyes went wide and one lip curled over the other in speculation. So she wasn't his girl friend, or rather, vice versa. Then what was she doing in his company? He stole a sidelong look at her. Her profile was the loveliest he had ever seen. She was so young, so innocent. And that goon lying there in the street, his hair no longer slick, though still oily as ever, his sport coat now dirty and the light-colored slacks showing a sudden stain of grease; he was the type who went for, well it was hard to say what kind of women, but certainly not this kind. Jimmy's shoulders heaved in an unconscious movement. What the heck! It wasn't his affair.

He stepped down into the street, helped Mac dust himself off, and turned to see whether the others were all right. The two bums were weaving on their feet, their bleary eyes trying to bring things into focus, their senses still deadened by whiskey, and obviously not too aware of what had happened.

He stiffened abruptly. The tough character was advancing on him. And from the man's very attitude, murder was on his mind. One hand was held high, close to the parting of the jacket. A gun in a shoulder holster, Jimmy thought.

Jimmy bent slightly at the knees, slid one foot out, and let his muscles relax. If things were going to happen he wanted to be set for them.

But nothing happened. Suddenly

the other straightened, bit his lip and said: "Okay, wise guy. Maybe I'll be seeing you? But I got things to do tonight. Let's go, Lois...."

So her name was Lois. Pretty as she was. Jimmy sighed, nor was he conscious of the sigh. Mac was waiting him and without a backward glance Jimmy stepped to the car snug against the light post. His eyes went wide in shock. There wasn't a soul in the car!

"Hey!" Mac grunted. "What's this?"

"I don't know," Jimmy said. "But I wonder what the super's going to say when we report one driverless car hit a lamppost in front of 4765?"

"Well what d'ya know?" the thick voice of the bum called Lou growled behind the two street car men. "Ain't nobody home...."

Jimmy's irritation turned to anger. He thought he had gotten rid of the two bums. Evidently he hadn't. "Say! Why the hell don't you guys find some place to go?" he demanded.

"No place out here," Lou said. "We gotta get to Madison Avenue."

"You're on Madison Avenue," Jimmy replied. "So get lost."

"Ya don't shay," Lou's voice blurred slightly. "An' here I thought we were on Broadway. Small world."

"It'll be smaller and rougher if you guys don't get moving," Jimmy reminded them.

"We're citizens," Jemmy suddenly let his voice be heard. "We got rights."

JIMMY GAVE up then. Besides, he had no time to be arguing. He was six minutes behind schedule now and another car would be coming up any minute. He turned, saw there was an all-night cigar store open on the corner.

"I'll phone in, Mac," he said, and

started swiftly off toward the store.

The store was open, the lights were on, the stock was in order, but not a soul was around.

"Hey! Hey! Where's everybody?" Jimmy asked.

Not even an echo.

A fine way to do business, Jimmy thought as he made for one of three phone stands. He fished out a nickel, inserted it and dialed the West Side barn. The dial worked, there was the familiar ringing, but no one answered. He let it ring for a full minute, then decided to call the operator. Perhaps there was something wrong he knew nothing of? Once more there was the ringing sound and this time Jimmy let it ring for a full two minutes. Slamming the receiver down on the cradle, he turned and stalked from the store. No wonder there was nobody in it. Not even phone service....

He looked kitty-corner and saw the bulk of the Northwestern station. Calling to Mac that he wouldn't be long he dashed across the street.

Mac leaned against the wrecked car. He had seen a lot of things in his day, and now he had seen something he had never dreamed of, a driverless car which had had an accident. He pulled out the old-fashioned railroad watch, looked at it and saw that the next car was due in another minute. Jimmy better hurry, he thought. Or the whole street would be behind. Now and then Mac looked toward the two bums who were holding an earnest and involved conversation. But Mac knew better than to butt in. The whims of drunks could lead to sudden mayhem, although this pair seemed harmless enough.

Also deep in low-voiced talk were the oddly assorted pair of flashy hoodlum and naive innocent girl. She was doing the talking, and now and then

the man would shake his head in a negative gesture.

Then Jimmy was coming at a run from the station and Mac placed the watch back in its pocket. He stiffened when he saw that something was wrong. It was apparent in Jimmy's wide eyes, which almost showed panic.

"Mac! Mac! What the hell's the matter with this place?" Jimmy yelled.

"Now take it easy, boy," Mac said in calming tones. Yet, though his voice showed no strain, Mac was concerned. It wasn't like Jimmy to act like this. On the whole Jimmy was pretty level-headed.

"Sure. Yeah. I'll take it easy, Mac," Jimmy said. He took a deep breath, and then, with obvious strain at control, he went on: "Look! There's something wrong. Terribly wrong, Mac. There isn't a soul in the Northwestern station. Not a man, woman or child. Yet the place is lit up, there's trains standing on the tracks, and then, I saw something made my hair stand on end.

"**A** TRAIN pulled in, a Diesel streamliner. It rolled to a stop and...." he paused and, at the other's questioning glance, went on, "and that was all. Mac, I walked the length of the track just to make sure. That train rolled in and there wasn't a soul on it, not a soul. No engineer, no fireman, no conductors, no passengers, no nothing. Just a twelve-car train."

"Now Jimmy, boy!" Mac tried to make light of it. Perhaps Jimmy was sick or something...all this excitement. Wasn't there something someone said about Jimmy being shocked in the war? Well.... "Suppose you just set down in the car? You'll feel better after a while."

But Jimmy was shaken to his soul. "Yeah! Yeah. Maybe I'd better." Then reason came to his rescue. He

knew that he had seen what he had just described to Mac. There wasn't anything wrong with him. He wasn't suffering hallucinations. "No, Mac. I'm not nuts. Because you can go across the street to that cigar store. There isn't a person in it. What's more; how come there isn't a soul on the street? The place ought to be alive with bums looking at the crash."

That had bothered Mac also. This end of Madison Avenue, even at this hour of the morning, was usually fairly filled with people. Especially on a pleasant summer morning, as this one was. Yet there wasn't even a cat to be seen. Suddenly Mac stepped to the center of the street, right on the tracks, and looked back down the direction from which they'd come. Coming down the street was a streetcar. Also to be seen were other vehicles. Now one passed him going west. And in the quick glance he had of it he saw that there was no one in the driver's seat. His face went grey as the predawn light. Though there was all sorts of motor and vehicle activity there wasn't a human being to be seen.

The streetcar ground to a stop a yard or so behind 4765.

There was no need to investigate. It was a driverless, conductorless, passengerless streetcar....

As though instinct or foreboding banded the six together, the others drew close to the blue-clad figures standing by the side of the newly arrived car. Their eyes and figures were suddenly strained, and oddly, the drunks were no longer inebriated. They could only stare in silent wonderment at the car. It was the girl who voiced what was in their minds:

"Mike! Mike, I'm scared!"

"**A**LL RIGHT, folks!" Jimmy's voice suddenly held a tone of

command. On the instant panic gripped the others, it left him. Whatever it was that was so mysterious could never be solved with their minds in utter confusion. "Suppose we all calm down... There! That's better. Now here's what we'll do. If you men'll help me get this wreck out of the way I'll take all of us down to the Loop. Maybe we'll get a flash of inspiration on the way down. Right?"

They weren't all agreed—Mike wanted to do something else; what he couldn't say—but in the end they could think of nothing better.

They were even more confused by the time they reached the Loop. Confused and frightened. It was a terrifying experience to ride and see autos and trucks and streetcars go by and not a human in them. It was though a machine age had come, a machine age which had no need of human beings at the controls of the cars. The Loop was even worse. The usual early-morning activity was to be seen but it became horrible to watch. And finally, at Dearborn and Madison, Jimmy stopped the streetcar and stepped wearily from it.

"End of the line," he said, leaning against the side of the car. "Far as we go...."

He meant it in more ways than one. He had been listening closely as he sat at the controls. Already the drunks were planning on a grand spree. The first thought in their minds had been the free and abundant whiskey to be had without worrying about being caught drinking it. Whatever Mike and the girl meant to do could be done without risk, now. He waited for the others to follow him from the car while these thoughts ran through his mind.

"I gotta get a drink and sober up," said Lou suddenly.

"I think we could all use one," Jimmy put in unexpectedly. "There's a spot over there...."

THE BAR was new and glistening with chrome and freshly polished mahogany. The bottles behind it seemed never to have been opened. There was a small bandstand on which stood a drum and piano. But the place was empty. Mac walked behind the bar while the others found stools on which they sat and stared morosely, with the exception of the girl, into the long polished mirror behind the bar.

"Well," Mac said as he lifted his glass on high, "down the hatch and let's hope this is just a dream."

One and all drank to it. But the whiskey tasted like water. It was just like drinking colored water.

"Oh, no!" Lou said in horrified tones. "This can't be!"

But it was. Mac tried the whiskey from several bottles. They all had the same taste. Water. Colored water.

Lois had taken a small sip of her glass, made a face and put the glass back on the counter. Suddenly her face lit up as though the most wonderful thing she'd ever imagined had come true. She whirled on the dark-skinned man seated at her right and spoke in a high ringing voice:

"I don't care what's happened, where we are, how we got here. All I know is that there won't be any murder today. I just got the feeling there won't be any more murders. Whatever happened wiped the slate clean. We're never going back to that terrible place we came from and my brother is safe. From you and the rest of your evil gang."

The dark-faced man went sallow. Only the fierce light in his eyes showed the intensity of his feelings. They weren't pleasant. He sat, half turned to Lois. Suddenly his hand came up

in a slap at her cheek. The blow fell like a clap of thunder in the silence of the place. Her sharp indrawn breath echoed the blow.

"Keep that pretty trap of yours shut!" he said viciously.

JAMES PATRICK FLYNN hated fighting. He had always assumed men could settle their differences without resorting to fisticuffs. Yet he was also aware of the fact that there *were* times, and that there *were* situations which could only be settled to complete satisfaction by means of a pair of hard-hitting fists. This was one of those things.

His stool went crashing backward as he leaped from it and dashed to the man and woman. The sound of the falling stool gave the dark-skinned man warning. He whirled and jumped from his stool in time to meet the head-low charge of Jimmy. Too late to grab for the gun in the shoulder holster, he threw a right hand in a vicious chop at Jimmy's head.

It connected and knocked Jimmy off balance. Then the dark-faced man threw up his right knee in an underhand attempt to cripple Jimmy. Had the kick landed it would have incapacitated him. But it landed on his thigh and only stopped him for a second. Then Jimmy was in close and pumping away with both hands at the other's mid-section. Step by step he drove the hoodlum backward until they were at the doorway. Then Jimmy straightened, shifted suddenly and shot an uppercut home with the full driving power of his pivoting body behind it. The hoodlum went sailing backward, to land in the street with a thud.

He fell and sprawled in unconsciousness.

"I've been wanting to do that from the minute I saw him with you," Jimmy said to the girl.

The marks of the man's fingers were still scarlet on Lois' pretty face. She was sitting stiff and straight, eyes bright with unshed tears, head erect and proud. Her voice was low, as she thanked Jimmy:

"It doesn't make any difference now," she said. "Someone should have done what you did; long ago. Thank you. And now that you have disposed of him, what of us?"

It was the question he was afraid of, didn't know the answer to. He tried to pass it off in a casual manner; "What do you mean? I'm not the official guardian of this group. At least I haven't been appointed such."

"You know what I mean," Lois said. "Putting it plainly, it seems that the people of a whole city, and for all we know, of the whole world have disappeared. We are all that's left of that world. What do we do now...?"

"First we put your words to the test," Jimmy said as he left her side and strode to the radio in one corner of the bar. He switched it on, tried station after station. There was the familiar hum, the lights on the panel lit up, but not a sound broke through, not a voice was heard. Quickly he went to the television set. He switched it on but could not even get a station pattern.

The others watched in fascination, too stunned to do anything else but watch. The tragedy of their situation struck them in its full force. Something had happened which made them the only beings alive in the whole city and perhaps in the whole world.

"Look," Mac said, pointing to the outside.

"Daylight," the girl said. "A new day. A new world."

"Then let's go out and face it," Jimmy said, taking her arm.

THE OTHERS lifted themselves regnily from their stools and

followed Jimmy and the girl out of the tavern. The hoodlum was just picking himself up as they emerged. There was already a large lump on the underside of his jaw and his eyes were dazed and without focus. Then realization came to him and he came quickly to his feet. He looked all about him, as if in wonder that there had been no audience to the fight. And strangely, a sheepish look came to his face as he remembered that he was in an empty city.

"Are you through?" Jimmy asked as he paused momentarily beside the other.

"Yeah," said the hoodlum with a deep sigh. "Looks like I'm through. Me and the rest of us. Where are you going?"

"To look around. It's daylight. Maybe we can discover what happened."

"Okay with me. I'll tag along. Nothing else to do."

They walked east toward the lake. They saw the wall at the same time. It rose sheer and translucent before them. Past the wall, clothing the beyond in veiled mystery, was a sort of silver-shot mist. It rose to a height which seemed to have no ending, shutting out even the sky. The wall itself stood out where the edge of the water would normally be.

"When did they build this?" Lou asked. "Couldn't have been more'n a couple of days ago. I slept in Grant Park three days ago. Wasn't here then."

Jimmy looked north and south. As far as the eye could see, the wall extended. And as daylight became more bright he looked to the west. And far far in the distance he could make out the indefinite shape of this strange wall.

"What does it mean?" Lois asked.

"I don't know," Jimmy replied. "But since there is the evidence of our eyes before us let's make a play at guess-

ing. Everything we've seen tells us we are in Chicago. Right?"

They nodded in agreement.

"But we seem to be the only ones. Now what could have happened to the three and a half million people of this city? Did they just pack and leave? Did some strange disease carry them off?"

"No to all of these questions. No, because there would have to be left behind the evidence of what happened to them, get what I mean?"

Even the bums knew what he meant. For if death and disease had struck all the people down simultaneously, then there would have to be the evidence of their bodies. As for an instantaneous departure, it was unbelievable. Then what had happened?

JIMMY WENT on: "Whatever happened to the rest did not happen to us—Or a more logical view, what happened to us did not happen to the rest. To go back, there were six of us on a streetcar. Suddenly I remember falling into a daze, a daze which lasted I don't know how long. I came out of it and there was an auto in front of the car and a crash as it hit a post. Do any of you have any memory of a similar daze?"

All but the two bums had a recollection of the same sort of trance Jimmy had fallen into.

"Now do any of you recall what happened in that trance?" was his next question.

None did.

"Then there's our mystery," Jimmy declared. "What happened to us happened in the time we were in that trance. Now here's something else I've noticed. Everything we've seen is new, as though it were just manufactured. Even the things which are supposed to be old have a new look about them. There's an old jalopy parked at the curb. We passed it and I noticed that

though it looks old it just looks that way from a distance. Actually the paint on it is bright and fresh. What do you make of that?"

"Jimmy," Mac said, pursing his lips. "I'm not one with the fancy talk. But I think I know what you're driving at. You're telling us that this whole city is a manufactured one. Right?"

"Exactly."

"Then who manufactured it? And why?"

"That question, Mac," said Jimmy as his fingers tightened unconsciously about the arm of the girl, "is the sixty-four-dollar one. I wonder who has the answer to that?"

"LOOK!" SUDDENLY shouted Jimmy. "Stop it!"

He was pointing to the great wall before them. They turned quickly at his horrified shout and saw what was about to take place. The wall was curving inward on them. It was bending from the topmost part, slowly but, even as they watched, with gathering speed.

Jimmy turned to look for a spot of safety. There was none. He turned again and noticed that the mist from beyond was now *before* the wall. It was closing in on them even more swiftly than the translucent sheet. Now it was all about them. He grabbed the girl, held her close and whispered, "Don't be frightened, Lois, my darling. I've got an idea we're all right."

There was a pulsating to the mist, a shimmering and sway, as though it held a life of its own. Lower and lower it came. Lou and Jimmy were gibbering with fear. Mac had knelt and was praying aloud. The hoodlum was transfixed with fear. A saliva dribble drooled down his chin as his eyes darted rapidly about, seeking a means of escape which somehow always managed to escape him.

The mist closed down about them, covered them completely. And when it lifted they were back in the theatre again.

"Wha—What happened?" Jimmy asked dazedly. "Where are we?"

Lois was still clinging to his arm. Mike Grozio was still crouched down in the same position, his mouth still drooling, a look of madness still on his face. The two bums, Jemmy and Lou, were in a frightened embrace, and Mac was still bent in prayer.

But now the scene was changed completely. They were in some sort of theatre. There were strange men on the stage with them, men no taller than large midgets, with abnormally large heads and spindly legs and arms, men who wore togas. And others of the same kind were seated in the theatre, all with rapt faces intent on the stage.

"What is this?" Jimmy demanded in strident tones. "Who are you and how did we get here?"

"You have no memory of the time-transition?" said one of the strangers who stood almost directly in front of Jimmy.

"All I know is that we were facing an immense wall which was collapsing about us...." Jimmy began.

But the other held up a hand and a small frown of annoyance broke on his forehead. "No, no! I don't mean the last transition. I mean the first.... But I see you don't. Hmm. An unforeseen development. Just as the experiment of creating a place of residence identical to the one of the third plane was a failure. The collapsing wall was but a mental state. It told us that we had failed. I know why, of course. We had forgotten a small but highly important factor. The peopling of the city. Since we managed to bring only the six of you out of the third plane, perforce the six of you were the entire population of the city

though our machines manufactured all else necessary.

“WE STILL cannot manufacture a human being.”

There was a muted murmur of voices, voices which stilled abruptly as the small man held up a hand again.

“It should now be apparent to all of us that we were not quite ready for the time-transition and transposition experiment. Not all factors had been taken into consideration. The essence of the entire experiment was to transplant a number of human beings from one plane to another and, at the same time, not have them lose their individuality. Which, of course meant, have them continue living their lives as they had been living them, with the single difference of our supervision.”

“I get it now!” Jimmy broke in. “The streetcar and the six of us happened to be in a time-fault at the moment you broke through. The city we were in was Chicago, but a manufactured one. No wonder everything was so new, so never-been-used. So you failed. Now what?”

“To live here in the plane would be as beings in a cage, on exhibit,” said the little fellow. “It is not just or right. We cannot return you to the same time-plane, but we can return you to the same place-plane. You have your choice.”

“Let me get this straight,” Jimmy said. “We can be returned but it won’t be to the same time. In other words it might be in a past time or a future one. Right?”

“Precisely.”

“But how can that be?”

“I told you once before. Time is a word. The cocoon of time holds the past, the present and the future in the same wrappings. There is no death. Only a space interval in which the body returns to the cocoon. When

again life returns it may be the future, the past or the present. But to the individual it is always the present.”

“By that token,” Jimmy said, “we are still on streetcar 4765 on Madison Avenue right now?”

“Right! Time has simply stood still for you....”

“But if you cannot return us to the same time, then what happens to those bodies on the streetcar?”

“They cease to exist. Because they had never existed. In other words, there never was a streetcar 4765, a man named James Patrick Flynn, a woman named Lois Phipps; just as all the rest of you are phantoms created out of time.”

“But you just said we were still on the streetcar,” Jimmy persisted.

“Only until you arrive in a new time.”

“And in this new time we will be sent back to...?”

“You will all arrive together. But it may very well be that you will be separated by environment and condition.”

“BUT I DON’T want that!” Lois suddenly said. “I don’t know how it happened and I don’t care. But now I don’t want to live unless I can live my life with this stranger.

“Just a short while ago I was a living dead woman, trying to save the life of my brother. Now it doesn’t matter, for the man who can take my brother’s life for a deed he never committed will be dead. But this I know! I love this man, this stranger to me in the blue uniform. I want to be near him always.”

The tiny man spread his arms in a gesture of resignation. “I can promise nothing,” he said. “What will be, will be.”

“For a scientist, you’re a hell of a big fatalist,” Jimmy said scornfully.

"We learn many things," said the other. "And some, never. I must accept their being though I understand them not. Now, will you come along with me, please...?"

They found themselves at last in a large room. The walls were all of a subdued though pleasing color. Six tables were rolled into the room. They were made to lie on the tables, fully clothed. Then over each face a mask was placed. From a distance they could hear the pulsating beat of a vast motor. Though they could not see the machines being wheeled in they could hear them, and the murmuring voices.

There were some twenty of the small men in the room. They attended the six on the tables in small groups. Various registers were placed close to each table and then a complicated bit of machinery was wheeled in. Twin lengths of tubing ran from a pair of outlets in the machine. These tubes were inserted into pads which were placed to each temple of the one on the bed. When all the pads and tubes were in place, the small scientist who had been the spokesman gave a signal. One of their number pressed a switch, and the machine began to hum. And after a moment there was no one on the bed.... So it followed until there was nothing left but six empty beds....

"....Captain Haig...."

"Yes, General Washington....?"

"Oh, what a dream. I dreamed I was in another world, a strange world of machines. Lord! But these British fools sometimes can make life miserable.... Is everything in readiness for the crossing of the Delaware?"

"YES, GENERAL. The men are awaiting their orders."

"Then I will go to them. But this dream. I seemed to be a sort of supernumerary of a most peculiar vehicle

which ran on wheels. Ah, well. Dreams. The stuff of the future. The present calls, and we must answer. Let us be on our way, Captain...."

"I think I shall take a stroll this fine morning, Payson...."

"Yes, M'Lud," said the servant in the green breeches with the fancy coat of scarlet. He kept his eyes lowered, as was the wont of his station.

"London seems its grey self this morning. Too bad. A bit of sun would make things appear in brighter light. But that is why we spend so much of our time in gayer company in even-tide. Drink and be merry. The laughing maid and the game room," Lord Whipspade smiled, albeit somewhat grimly. The evening past had cost him a hundred guineas, guineas hard to replace. Besides which, he had awakened with a most ferocious headache. Rum straight was not a pleasant drink after brandy.... "I had a most peculiar dream last night, Payson...."

"Yes, M'Lud."

"Heavens!" Lord Whipspade broke out suddenly. "What dreams can make of us. Hah! I dreamed we were bosom companions, living a life which held nothing but a cup, a cup of spirits, and that we lived equally together...."

"M'Ludship jokes...."

"No, Payson. That was my dream."

Mubongi awoke covered with sweat. He lay quiet for a moment. The dream he had just had. Surely the Gods of the forest were conspiring against him. What magic had been given him the night before that he should dream this thing? He had been in a strange land, wearing garments which he had never imagined. There was some sort of halter about his shoulder in which there was a strange thing of metal, a thing like a tube....

Mubongi arose, stretched himself, and slipped down the bole of the tree. Soon he would arrive at the water site

and there would be another there. Hingo, the chief. How Mubongi hated Hingo! But soon there would be no chief, for Mubongi would loose the sliver of branch from his bow. Then he would return to the village with Hingo's head and proclaim himself chief....

He stepped forward into a small patch of sunlight, and something streaked toward him and buried itself into his breast. And from the depths of the underbrush Hingo, the chief, stepped forth. He stepped to the side of the dead man, took his great knife from his belt and with a single slice severed the head of Mubongi. Hingo had known all along that Mubongi had trailed him....

"....I therefore pronounce you man and wife," said the preacher.

AND JAMES PATRICK FLYNN and Lois Phipps were joined in wedlock.

After, as they prepared to retire, James P. Flynn took his bride in his arms and said:

THE END

Photography — ALWAYS A STEP AHEAD

By JACK WINTER

A NEW TYPE of photography known as electrophotography has been invented. In this system a conventional lens arrangement is used. But the light does not fall on photographic film—instead it falls on a plate of selenium which it electrically charges, the image varying in electric density over the plate. Then when a fine film of the dust of carbon is blown over it, the carbon clings to the charged areas, reproducing the picture perfectly! There is no

developing or fixing or transferring. That is the picture. If desired, the "film" (the selenium plate) can be wiped clear instantly and another picture taken.

Another problem introduced by the atomic age has been solved. Ordinary photographic film cannot be used in radioactive areas—but the selenium plate is completely unaffected. Electrophotography also promises to be extremely useful in many other fields as well.

"I wonder what happened to that hoodlum, Mike Grozio....?"

Lois lifted her head from her husband's shoulder and erased the frown which the mention of Grozio's name had brought. "It's all gone, dear," she said. "Why think back on it?"

"I can't help it," her husband replied. "After all. If I hadn't been riding old 4765 that night we'd never have met. Then who would have knocked him to the street for what he tried to do? And who knows who you might have fallen in love with?"

She kissed him to keep him quiet. Then, smiling, she said:

"It seems like a dream, doesn't it? I wonder what happened to those two bums. And good old Mac. Imagine an uncle of his leaving all that money and Mac being able to go back to Scotland...."

"Baby," Jimmy said as he clasped her close. "There's only one thing I've got to remember. That you're my wife and that I'm your husband...."

And after all that *was* the most important thing...

MACHINES MUST FIT THE MEN

* By DON MORROW

UNTIL COMPARATIVELY recently, the complex machines and tools of modern civilization have too frequently been built with the attitude—"Let 'em learn how to operate them". With the exception of hand tools, which have developed over dozens of centuries, tools and machines have too frequently been hard for men to use. But in this day of jets, high-speed cars, potential rockets, electronic mechanisms and other complicated apparatus, that attitude no longer goes.

This of course is not news to anyone. All you have to do is reflect back on the machines of a couple or three decades ago and compare them with today's. Invariably the present-day equipment not only looks better; it feels better. The reason, of course, is that engineers and scientists have begun to realize that you can't change the human structure. It's a lot easier to build the machine to fit the man—than attempt the reverse.

For example, such little things as knobs and dials can make a big difference. Psychologists have been called in and they describe how important it is to the human operator to have scales he can read easily, to have dials his fingers can recognize merely by feel. Controls and buttons arranged for human comfort make all the

difference in the world. The man operates the machine many times more surely and efficiently if everything has been arranged to make it easy for him to do so.

Typically, from conditioning by clocks and watches, the human eye invariably wants to read a circular dial clock-wise fashion, not the reverse. Therefore, when a dial is arranged to read counter-clock-wise, the eye and brain resent this and confusion can easily result. Again, on vertical scales the high numbers should be on the top; the scale should read going upwards; we are conditioned to regarding "height" as "greater than". Scales which work in reverse introduce trouble and the chance for error.

Makers of such homely, familiar gadgets as home appliances, TV sets, radios and so on, recognize this and design accordingly. Notice the next time you turn on the gadgetry how much easier the big dials and easily graspable knobs are. There are few better ways to modify modern equipment than to change its controls. The system is so successful that many things are crystallizing into a pattern which we won't expect to see changed for hundreds of years—just as simple hammers, saws and other hand-tools have assumed a sort of "natural" form.

A Switch FOR BRAIN CELLS

By CHARLES REOUR

COMPUTING machines almost invariably operate with one basic element, a switch, a relay, or a vacuum tube which has just two states of electrical or mechanical activity; that is, the device can be either *on* or *off*. By using enough of these elements, quite complex chains of relations can be considered, and the device be made to "think".

Now, in trying to understand the operation of the human mind, it has occurred to observers that undoubtedly something very akin to such machine activity must go on in the brain. They've made the analogy between brain cells and machine elements—and in both things electricity is the conveying element. Each brain cell is regarded as similar to a relay or vacuum tube, which also has an *on-off* arrangement. But in the human mind, with billions of these elements, an inconceivably intricate

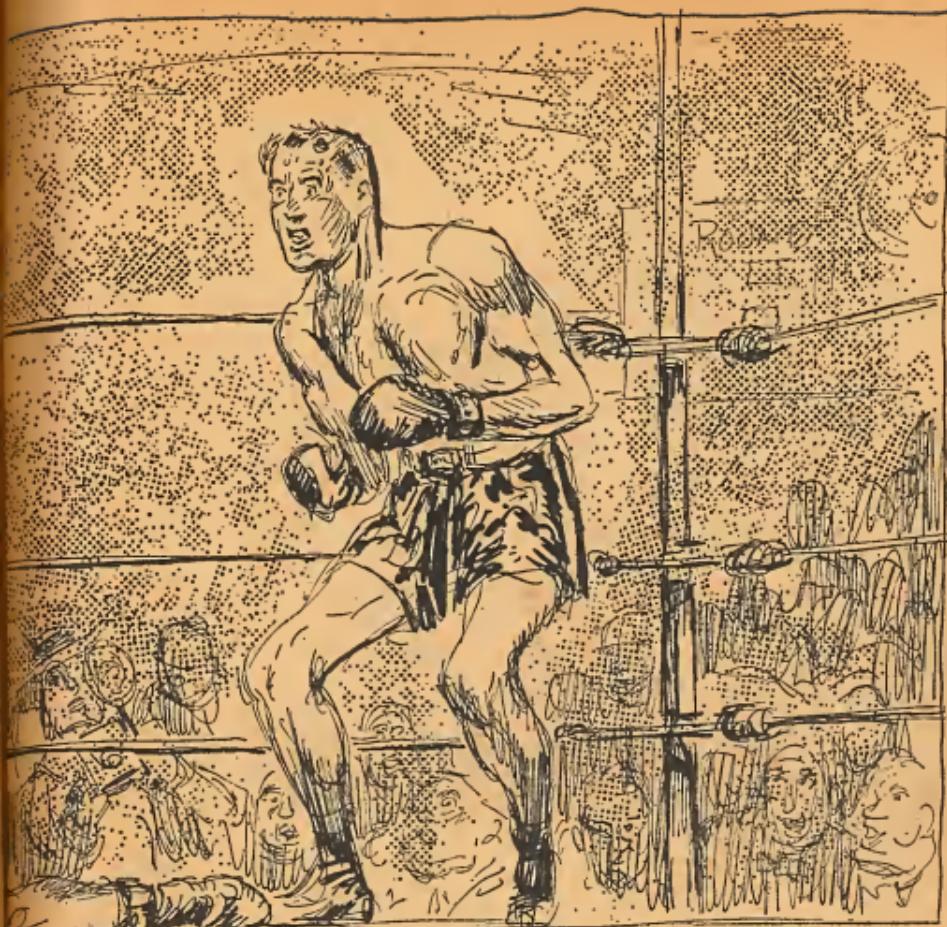
complex of ideas can be handled.

It is no wonder that the analogy is made, since it seems to fit so neatly. Unquestionably, though, it is an oversimplification. The brain probably has additional elements of whose very existence we are unconscious. Still, a good deal of sense is made in the simple electrical case, and since machines can simulate even the disorders of the mind, it is apparent that the researchers are not too far off the right track. Probably the greater portion of brain cells constitutes a memory-bank, in which is stored every impression ever passed through by the receptors of the eyes, ears and other organs. Just how the "scanning" of this bank is done is still hazy, naturally, but further study of the cathode ray tube scanner, for example, might provide a startling clue. The brain is an electrical thinking machine!



STUMBLE BUM

**He thought he'd killed a man and thus
become a bum. But no one told him the
man was more than flesh and blood**



He wondered how many men he had to beat

By LESTER BARCLAY

THE TWO men at the bar were as different as night and day; the shorter of the two, heavy through the chest and shoulders; the taller slim to the point of spareness. The shorter was also heavy fleshed in the face and neck, and altogether he looked like an ex-pug or wrestler, or one who had been beaten about a great deal. The taller had the same

lean look in his face that went with the rest of him.

But in their eyes and on their lips there was a sameness that was unmistakable.

Their eyes were bleak as winter's night, and their mouths so tight that their lips were bloodless lines, as lips can become when they have little to say and seldom say even that.

The bar was called "Finian's Castle, No. 1." There were four others scattered through the city, or rather, on the edges of the Loop. An Irishman named Clarence Finian had turned from dishonest bootlegging to dishonest bartending, and had built the chain. He was dead. His widow, a religious, had sold the taverns, one by one. But so great was their name among the skid-row bums, that the present owners had never changed them.

Castle No. 1 had an immense circular bar, fully a hundred feet around. Huge casks of wine, supported on strong horses, stood in a clear space in the middle. There were spigots on both sides, so that the bartenders could draw the strong, raw wine from either end of the cask. The wine, and the large schooners of beer, which were served for only a dime, were the drawing cards of the Castle. For here it was that Skid-Row could get a very pleasant jag on for as little as a dollar.

The present owner of the Castle was a man named George Welsh. He came to the tavern only once in twenty-four hours, at two o'clock in the morning, and then stayed only long enough to take from the head bartender the fat envelope containing the day's and night's receipts. Although the Castle paid excellent dividends, Welsh's main source of income was from the horses. All the Loop bookies laid off their daily-double bets with Welsh. It was said, by close associates, that his daily take was in the neighborhood of five thousand. Of course, it was not all clear; there was always the payoff for somebody, from police captains to the man on the beat.

And Welsh *always* went to his down-town office first, there to take with him enough thousands to take

care of his boys. Then he came direct to the Castle.

But this night he was to be a little late.

Welsh nodded a perfunctory good-night to the night auditor, stepped briskly past the inner office door and waited for Gus, the beetle-browed doorman, to give the guards the signal Welsh was on his way out. Welsh smiled at Gus as the door swung open, stepped out into the corridor and waited for the two guards, their hands deep in jacket pockets, to join him. Then, he in the middle, the three moved to the elevator which money had reserved for his use alone.

Welsh was, at this time, in his middle years. He had a naturally florid complexion, which good bartering made even more flushed than nature had intended. He had a fair figure, slightly fatted about the middle, but hidden by the excellent fit of a two-hundred-dollar suit. He liked soft materials and favored French flannels and imported Shetlands. He had a single idiosyncracy which was well known. Because he had slender, small feet, he liked them to be seen to their best advantage, in fifty-dollar custom-made oxfords. He had a hundred pairs of them.

THE ELEVATOR, as though apprised of their coming, slid to a halt, and, as the doors parted, the two guards stepped in front of Welsh. But the only occupant of the elevator, its operator, grinned shyly and said:

"Evenin', Mister Welsh. Right on the nose, huh?"

"On the button, Tommy," Welsh replied, as he stepped to the back, the two guards standing a little in advance and to either side of him.

The elevator started noiselessly. But it hadn't completed half its journey when it stopped with a whining

of motors and a sickening lurch of the cab.

Welsh turned pale, and one hand shot to his inner pocket in a reflex action of protection; it was where he kept the Manila envelope with the money. But the guards only stepped forward, one behind and the other to the side of the elevator man.

"What's wrong, jerk?" one of them gritted. And the knotted fist with its weapon jammed hard against the blue uniform.

"I—I, w-w-wait! The brakes jammed!" Tommy bleated in terror.

"So get it moving," the same guard said. The other only stood behind Tommy, and his hand was no longer in his pocket. The gun was in the open and the metal gleamed in the small light.

"If the chain slipped," Tommy said, and shook his eyes free of the sweat which had come to a cold life on his brow, "we're really stuck."

"What do you mean?" Welsh asked in his soft voice.

"Nothin' I can do, Mister Welsh," Tommy said, and he turned his head to look with beseeching eyes at the bookie.

"So! Well, how long do we stay here?" Welsh asked.

"Oh, it won't be long. They'll know somethin's wrong downstairs. The light on my bank goes out. They'll be openin' the doors down there, any second. I'll holler down...."

"And?"

"...an' I'll tell 'em what happened. Only thing, we'll have to wait for the emergency crew to arrive. That *will* take a little time. Maybe half an hour."

"Okay. Now listen, Tommy," Welsh said. "When they get here, you tell them that there's a C note apiece for every man if they get us out in fifteen minutes, understand?"

"Gotcha, Mister Welsh," Tommy said, and the relief in his voice made it rise until it sounded as if a tear had been behind it.

"Looks like I'm going to be a little late," Welsh said, *sotto voce*...

HE'S LATE," said the thinner of the two who were sitting at the bar. His eyes had flashed in quick appraisal of the time to the clock above the steam table which lined one wall of the tavern.

"Yeah," said the other. "He'll be here."

"Sure. When?"

"What's the difference? I cased the setup pretty good."

The bartender came over, slid a damp cloth across the walnut, after lifting their glasses, removed their ash tray, and dumped its contents in the rubbish bin under the bar. The thin man lifted his hand and stuck two fingers in the bartender's face.

The two men watched the bartender move away, then looked at each other. Each let his left hand fall below the level of the bar to where their jackets fit snuggly at the waist. In each of their waist bands, a long-barreled pistol lay flat against the belly. And though the upper parts of them seemed lax, their legs were taut against the stools, ready to thrust them away if anything was amiss.

But the man came back with a bottle, poured drinks carefully, swished water in glasses for their chasers, and found another customer a few stools down, after ringing up their money.

"Easy, Heavy," said the thin one.

"Yeah, Ye-ahh!" said his partner.

* * *

"Slug" Gordon staggered, recovered his balance, and paused carefully on the curb. He peered through red-rimmed, flat eyes, whose peculiar characteristic was their shallow depth,

at the clock above the McCory Hotel. It was exactly two in the morning. Slug grinned, a wry twisting of his lips, and his tongue flicked out over the crusted lips. It felt only the dryness of the skin.

He turned his attention away from the clock and looked up and down the street. This was his domain, Skid Row. There, on a refuse can, was Joe the Louse. His scrawny hunched body was bent low, and his whole being, from his small mean eyes to the soles of the shabby tennis slippers he wore, was concentrated on the business at hand, the search for a head louse. In one hand he held a box which had once contained pills. Now it was full of lice. The other hand, the fingers frantically stabbing in the thicket of his uncombed, filthy hair, moved fitfully against his head. Suddenly the hand was stilled, and in a second the fingers appeared, between the thumb and index fingers a struggling louse. With a care that was loving, Joe placed the louse into the box. Then the fingers went back to their search again.

A movement from the vestibule of Gus the Greek's caught the corner of Slug's eye. He turned his head and saw it was "Shamus" O'Brien, the cop. O'Brien wiped his mouth with a wide, thick hand. He was a fixture on Skid-Row. For twenty-four years he had been on the same beat, and though eligible to retire, wouldn't. He knew the best he could do would be to get a watchman's job in a bank or factory. On the street, he was good for his hundred and a half a week. O'Brien liked Skid-Row. And oddly enough, Bum's Boulevard liked the good-natured Irishman. If for no other reason than the one; he never made a pinch unless he *had* to. And the times he had to were few and far between.

O'Brien spotted Slug at the same instant as the other had seen him. He ambled over on splay feet, treading heavily and surely.

"Just goin' in or comin' out, Slug?" O'Brien asked. He sucked noisily at his teeth for a few fragments of the beef he had in the Greek's.

SLUG CLEARED his throat. Usually he didn't mind blowing air with the cop. But Slug's mind had room for a single thought, *yoicky*. The devils were already starting their dance in his brain. Only whiskey could quiet them. And there wasn't even a drop left in either of the two bottles he had bought only two days ago. *Darn that clerk! Did they have to send the check in care of the hotel? Didn't they know the hotel took out a whole month's rent after they cashed the check? And that left only twenty dollars. That was four days ago. Now there wasn't anything left in the bottles. And worse, he hadn't even enough for a drink of wine!*

It was an effort to think. Slug shook his head and squinted. Maybe O'Brien . . . ?

"Look, Shamus. Uh . . . maybe a deemer, huh?"

"Now why do you need a dime, Slug?" O'Brien asked, the smile still wide on his mouth. Of a sudden it was wiped clear. "Hey! your check came Monday, four days ago. What the hell happened to it?"

Slug spoke aloud everything that came to mind:

"Yeah . . . that check! You know, Shamus. The hotel takes over. I get just a couple bucks . . . Yeah! Just a couple bucks. A guy's gotta eat, ain't he?"

"Don't give *me* that!" O'Brien said sharply. "I know all about that check! After Garrison takes the

month's rent out, there's twenty bucks left. So?"

"So nuts!" Slug shouted hoarsely.

The wet, warm blue eyes iced. O'Brien was no longer jovial.

"Okay, Slug," O'Brien said softly. "Better take it easy. You're lookin' for trouble...."

"Yeah. An' maybe I'll find it," Slug said.

"Not on my beat. 'Cause if you do, I'll throw you in so deep, it'll take a sandhog to find you."

Slug started to tell the other what to do with himself, but changed his mind at the last second. O'Brien *might* get mad enough to do what he said he would. And Slug knew a night in jail would send him out of his mind.

O'Brien watched the other move slowly and carefully across the street, waiting judiciously for traffic to thin before he took a step. The angry light faded and was replaced by one of pity. *Darn it! They were still men, human beings, not animals!*

But Slug had already forgotten the cop. Yocky! Vinol! Even beer. He didn't care. Just something to give him—to give him that lift. Only let there be someone there who'd pop for a couple... Ah! The Brass Knuckle. Soupy, the bartender, wasn't a bad guy. He even popped once in a while... maybe...?

The smoke hung thick and low, fog-like. It was exactly five minutes past two. The bar held a full complement of customers. Even the tables had their fill. Behind the bar, before a backdrop of a velvet curtain which had once been magenta in color but which had faded through the years and was now streaked with dirt, there was a stage of sorts. A small piano stood in a corner, a useless prop; no one played it.

Slug shoved past several men, his

nostrils lifting at the sharp rank odor of whiskey and beer. His red-rimmed eyes shifted about like an animal's. Ah! That young guy between the girl and the old guy with the handle-bar moustache....

"Look, bud," Slug began, but his voice was so low and hoarse the words made no sense. He cleared his throat while the woman and her partner looked at him. "Look, bud," he began again. "How's about buyin' a guy a drink, huh?"

"Beat it, bum!" a thick voice urged in no uncertain accents.

Slug looked up. He had never seen *that* face before. Oh, God, no! This wasn't Soupy's night off! And this guy looked like a mean one.

"I said, beat it," the bartender said, and already his eyes were searching out the bouncer.

"Wait a minute, Jack," the young man broke in. "Let him stay. I'll buy him a drink."

"Okay, Jack," the bartender said, shrugging his shoulders. It wasn't any hair off his ears. "It's your money. What'll it be?"

"Whiskey. And don't ask what kind. Just whiskey!" Slug was barely able to get the words out. He reached for the shot and seeing his hand shaking, pounded it hard against the wood like a pulsating vein.

THE YOUNG man picked the glass up and carefully held it out so that not a drop spilled. Then with his free hand, he pulled down against Slug's chin. The whiskey went down the stumble-bum's throat without a spill.

"Bring him another," the young man said. Slug didn't see him wink at his female partner.

The shot had acted like a bracer. There was no quivering of the fingers this time. Slug shook his head

as the yucky hit, grinned, and said:

"T'anks. I ain't got no dough, an' maybe I look like a bum, but if you'd of killed a guy, maybe you'd look like me...."

The bartender, who had stayed to see what happened, after serving the drink, lifted his head at the words. There were words on his lips. Before he could utter them, however, someone called him from the other end of the bar. The customer leaned over, whispered something to the bartender which made him purse his lips.

"...Yeah," said the customer. "That's his 'mooch. He'll be all right. Besides, Bummer knows him. An' if he gets out of hand, Bummer'll handle him..."

In the meantime Slug was in his song:

"...Yeah. Me an' Mike Frelli... At the old Hippo, it was. Had the best left in the business those days. Don't look like it now, huh? I was good. So was Mike. He just liked to slug, he did. Haa! Come the fi't round. I was just coastin'. Got a little careless, like. An' Mike got through. He pasted me around, but he was slow.

"Y'know, a fighter feints with his feet, too. An' when he hurt me, I got on the bike and run. I feinted him silly. An' all the time I was gettin' hot. He was a dirty fighter. He hit me wit' everythin' in the dirty book, thumbs, heels, rabbit, everythin'. Then he calls me a dirty name when he can't catch me. So I let him in, feint wit' a hip, and when he opens up I shift an' *wham!*"

The two who were his audience had been listening closely. And when Slug paused, the young man said, with impatience:

"Yes. So what happened?"

"I hit him harder'n I'd ever hit anyone. An' he slams back an' his

head hits the ring post... He falls flat on his kisser, an' his hands is spread out an' any shmoe c'n see he's deader'n hell. I didn't mean to! Honest! It was an accident. They kept tellin' me he wasn't dead. But I know..."

The woman who was with the young man didn't give any warning. She simply dropped her head and became violently ill over the young man's "new suit."

"Hey, *Bummer!*" It was the bartender, calling the bouncer into action.

And the Bummer came running. His thick, squat body was ideal for his work where he could get in close. And his greasy, sweating face was savagely alight with an odd lust. There was a thin white scar above his right eyebrow where a broken beer bottle had ripped away the flesh. His nose had been broken, and one ear was cauliflowered.

His left hand shot out and grabbed a handful of stained shirt. He pulled the stunned Slug forward, and hit him with his right, a good four inches below the belt. Slug doubled up, his mouth open, his eyes bulging, and the breath whistling in his throat. The Bummer hit him again, this time under the ear, the last blow sending Slug backward to fall in a heap on the threshold.

"Bum!" Bummer growled deep in his throat, as he moved forward.

BUT BEFORE he reached the fallen man, Slug managed to get to his feet and stagger out to safety.

It was the man with the handlebar moustache who had the last say on the subject:

"You're new here," he said to the bartender. "Soupy would have handled it different. He would have stopped Slug the minute he started.

That story always gets the women the same way.

"Funny thing is, it's true. He was a fighter. I saw him. That was twenty-odd years ago. Yeah, Slug was good. Not a champ by a long way, but good. Know what I mean?"

The bartender nodded, and the other went on:

"...An' like he was tellin', he an' Frelli were doin' the main event that night. So he hits Frelli and the greaser goes down. It was enough to raise the hair on a man's head, way Slug screams when he sees the blood pourin' outa Frelli's skull. Only he didn't kill Frelli! But Slug thought he did. An' before anyone knows what he's doin' Slug hops the ropes and beats it down the aisle and outa the Hippodrome. They didn't find him for three days. When they do, he's down here on Madison Street, drunker'n a smoky on needle-stuff.

"They straightened him up, as much as they could. He even fought a couple more times. But the minute he hit a guy, he'd get glassy-eyed and just drop his mitts. I think he fought four or five times, then the Comish stopped him. It was plain murder..."

"Frelli got a fractured skull out of it. Couldn't fight no more. He became a slugger for the syndicate then. I hear he's still around, though I ain't seen him in years. They say he got a silver plate in his skull...."

"An' this character, Slug, lost his marbles, huh?" the bartender asked.

"Well," said the other judiciously. "I wouldn't say that. I suppose one of them mind docs got a name for Slug's condition. But me, I think of it like a blood clot, there's some dissolve and go away. An' there's others what don't. They just ride along, an' pretty soon they block the canal..."

"An'?"

The other snapped his fingers.

"Just like that! One minute they're standin', next, they're layin'. But they ain't sleepin'. Know what I mean?" he nodded in time with the bobbing head across the bar and continued, "Slug's okay. He's harmless. See that dance he went into. It's the McCoy. Fat as he is, old as he is, there's still some of that old shuffle left.

"Okay. So he got thrown outa here. He'll mooch along, maybe to Hickey's Place or the Nut House, or even Ma's Joint. Everybody knows Slug. So maybe he'll get lucky an' get a buck in change. It'll be enough for four beers and four *vinos* at the Castle. That's his last stop. Usually, someone drags him upstairs to the McCoy where he lives..."

"The McCoy? Where does he get the fresh?"

"He had a right guy for a manager. The guy made a trust fund for Slug. He gets fifty bucks a month long as he lives. It ain't a hell of a lot, but it pays for the hotel, an' with the rest he buys bottled goods, stays in his room until there ain't no more, which means anywhere from three days to a week, an' goes back on the mooch..."

TEN MINUTES after two. Slug grinned crookedly at the clock, and started a staggering walk across the car line. A speeding cab missed him by inches. But Slug was lost to motion about him. His eyes were fixed on the glittering neons of Finian's Castle. Ma's Joint had proved a bonanza. A slick-haired greaseball had given him a whole dollar just to get rid of him. A whole buck! Four beers and four *vinos*, that's what a buck was goin' to buy him....

He pulled himself up on the bar stool and dropped both elbows on the walnut. A thin trickle of spittle dribbled from one corner of his mouth

and he sucked it back in, noisily. The bartender stopped in front of him and nodded in greeting. It was his favorite, "Red" Fine.

Slug dragged the dollar out of his pocket, laid it tenderly on the bar and said:

"Looka that! A scratch! A whole buck. Mine! All mine. An' you know what it's gonna buy me? That's right, you crazy redhead! Let's have 'em, one at a time."

Fine grinned, drew a schooner of beer, then turned and filled the four-ounce glass they used for wine to the brim with the dark-red liquid. Slug lifted the glass of wine, held it in front of his eyes, smiled tightly, and downed the four ounces in a single gulp. It took exactly five minutes for the dollar to serve its purpose.

Slug almost fell off the stool. He saved himself by grabbing the arm of the man alongside.

"Scuse me," Slug said. The grin was a crooked fixture now.

Slug felt fine! There were no devils dancing in his brain, now. Never felt better. He leered into the face of the man whose sleeve he had grabbed. Slowly, Slug began a shuffling dance, his left hand stuck out, pawing at the air.

"Hey, Mac!" he said hoarsely. "Looka this. Ever hear how I killed..."

"Blow, bum! Beat it!" the stranger said without turning his head.

Slug threw both hands outward. "Sure, Mac. Sure. I'm okay. Ha-ha. You're okay, I'm okay, everybody's okay. Let's all have a drink. Hey, Red..."

"Better blow, Slug," Red said. "You've had enough."

"You're good...good guy, Red. Like you. Shay! There's a couple guys maybe like to hear how I kill' man..."

"IT'S A QUARTER after," the thin one said nervously.

His partner lifted a corner of his mouth in a smirk. "So who's nervous now?" he asked. "Take it easy, Lammy. Welsh'll show."

The others eyes moved from clock to bar and along the curve of it to the doors on the Madison Street side. It was there Welsh came in.

Lammy said:

"I don't like this. I thought it was going to be a good score, easy-like. Let's blow, Heavy."

"We stay. There's eight grand wants splittin'," Heavy said.

"Hey, Mac," a thick low voice said from behind them. "Looka this..."

They turned their heads and saw Slug behind them, shuffling in his dance. There was a foolish leer on the stumble-bum's face.

The two froze instantly. Something like this could throw the whole score off. They had to get rid of the lush without creating a scene or fight. The thin one waved one of the bartenders in.

"...Me an' Mike was dancin' an' whammy! I shifts an' Mike follows. Good ol' Frelli. He bounces off the post like I'd hit 'im with a bat..." Slug wheezed hoarsely, as he shuffled back and forth behind them. "An' tha's how I killed Mike..."

The opaque eyes of the heavy man came alive. A startled recognition made them grow larger. He swung about on the stool and stared at Slug. This sodden hulk, this whiskey-soaked wreck... It was Slug Gordon. This stink with the welted face; those eyes, slitted bits of dancing madness; that mouth, like the rotted pulp of orange peel; the stubble around the chin; rime of greying weed. He shot out a hand and pulled Slug close.

"Look," he said softly. "Take a good look! I'm Mike Frelli. Yeah,

The guy you was s'posed to have killed..."

Slug pushed downward at the hand and it fell away. And for the first time in his life his brain became the instrument it was meant to be. All the tiny gears, all the wondrous machinery of the mind began to whirl. And with the swiftness of light, thoughts streaked through Slug's head:

He ain't lyin. It's Frelli. He is alive. But he can't be! All these years. I could have been something. An' now what am I? Yeah. What am I? Nah! He can't do this to me. If he ain't dead how do I.. Stop that! Little devils come back, huh! I'll show him. I'll kill him good, this time...

But only Heavy heard the whispered hoarseness of his partner's, "He's here! Welsh, at the door!"

It was Welsh. The dapper tavern keeper marched with brisk steps toward them. His bodyguards lounged in the doorway out of sight. But their eyes were glitted to the dapper figure. They didn't lose sight of him for a second. *This* was what they were being paid for. And Welsh reached the head bartender, whose station it was the two men were seated at.

The bartender smiled a greeting, rang a no sale on the register and took out the thick envelope and slid it across the bar. Welsh reached for it,

and bled in terror, as he caught the actions of the two men, from the corner of an eye. The thin one had reached into the waist of his trousers. There was a gun there. Now it was out. And Welsh turned and ran...

It was at that precise instant that Slug hit. Through the numbness which had suddenly gripped him came a single motivating force. He had to kill Frelli. But for good, this time. And Slug struck at the profile of heavy flesh with all his strength.

Frelli slumped sideways, fell off the stool, and, in falling twisted so that the back of his head struck against the pointed pyramid of brass that was the joint of the bar rail. He rolled away from it and lay face downward in the grime, spit and sawdust of the floor. And Slug saw beneath the sudden flood of crimson which poured from the split skull, a dull gleam of metal.

It was true. They'd put a silver plate in Frelli's skull. Only this time Frelli was *really* dead.

It was the last thought Slug ever had.

For as he struck, Frelli's partner pulled free the .38 from his trousers and snapped a shot at the fleeing Welsh. No one who was witness to the wild shooting which followed was able to say whose shot struck Slug. All the guns used were .38's.

THE END

A GREAT NEW SCIENCE-FICTION EPIC —

FRONTIERS BEYOND THE SUN

IN THE JANUARY AMAZING STORIES

Don't Miss it

THE MARTIAN CROSS

By
CLEE GARSON

**The Martians had a formula for taking over
the Earth: "Don't bother with the armies or
navies. Conquer only the new-born infants"**

TED MALONE settled his hard muscular shoulders more firmly into the jacket, straightened the knot in his tie and rang the bell again. He cleared his throat and went over the speech he had prepared: Darling, last night we talked about many things, and among those things were: one..." He shook his head and grunted. "Nah," he said aloud. "Sound like an old fuddy-duddy saying that. Why don't you just say: 'Honey I love you and you love me. So let's not waste any time and see the man who ties the knot officially?'"

The words trailed off and he was suddenly looking into a pair of worn faded eyes. He smiled sickly, then composed himself. "Oh-oh! Hello, Mrs. Purvis. Is Anita home?"

"Just missed her, Ted. Couple of seconds. Young feller rang the bell and asked for her. There was another waiting on the sidewalk, and after a minute Anita came down and got her coat and came down and went off with them." The woman's eyes were oddly strained now. "Had the funniest feeling she didn't want to go...."

"Well, didn't she say anything? She knew I was coming. Why, I called her only an hour ago. Told her to wait for me, that I had something very important to tell her. I don't understand."

The thin dry lips settled into a straight line and the eyes became sharper. She said with spirit: "Well. If I were you, and the girl I wanted to marry went off without a by-your-



Swiftly, the deadly rays crossed the void

leave or even a word of explanation, I'd get off the stoop and after her. They went around the corner up Belden Street. Watched 'em through the window, I did."

Ted had walked calmly up the four steps but now he took them in a single leap downward. A small dog snapped in a quick sidewise movement, then scurried out of the man's way as he ran and a couple of youngsters shouted something after him as he almost knocked them into the street, rounding the corner. But he was completely unaware of children or dog.

They couldn't have gotten very far, he reasoned. His wild run slowed to a swift walk. They couldn't have gotten very far, unless, of course, they had a car. He kept moving swiftly. Couple of seconds' start... His eyes lighted suddenly. He had caught sight of her!

HE WAS going at a full run when he came up to them. She was between a tall, wide-shouldered man in a tan slipover and dark brown slacks, and another, shorter, slimmer man, in a lightweight gabardine suit.

"Nita..."

They stopped at the sound of the voice behind them. The girl turned, and at sight of the heart-shaped face whose wide brown eyes, gentle as a fawn's, had always turned his heart to jelly, Ted breathed a sigh of relief.

The two men with the girl stepped in front of her, barring Ted's path. The smaller man did the talking. "Something you wanted...?"

"I'll send you a card," Ted said. He moved forward the three steps separating them until the three men were inches apart. He sized them up quickly. About his own age, twenty-five, the tall one had a tough, muscular face with a ridge of gristle over

the right eye, as if from being hit there a number of times. His nose looked broken, though not flattened. He had flat grey eyes in which anything and nothing could be read. The smaller one, about the same age, had a rather plump face, pleasant features and a wide smiling mouth. His eyes were intense, dark, curling at the corners. Inspection over, Ted said, "Out of my way!"

The big one put out a pair of hands not much smaller than those of a gorilla and held them flat against Ted's chest.

"Not right now," the small one said. "She'll see you later."

"I'll buy that," Ted said, "when *she* sells it to me."

"Areéta... Tell him."

She came forward and put her hand against one of the big man's wrists. The flat eyes looked down at the slender fingers with a blank expression. Then the eyes came up to meet those of the small man. Abruptly the hands fell away from Ted's chest.

"Thank you," the girl said softly. "I'm sorry, Ted. But I have to go with these men. Something I can talk about later. Not right now and here. It's all right. Believe me!"

Ted's shoulders jerked in a movement of helplessness. He saw she was under no compulsion. Her lips and eyes were smiling, asking understanding from him. He could do no less than grant her that. His smile was crooked, hurt but forgiving. "Okay, baby. I just thought something was wrong...."

"No. Everything is quite all right."

His shoulders sagged as he watched them move off. They only went a few feet and turned toward a Ford tudor parked at the curb. The small man got in first, Anita followed and the big man bent forward to get in. It might have been something else

Ted saw but he could have sworn there was a gun on the big guy's hip. The Ford moved smoothly away. He caught a last glimpse of Anita as it sped out of sight. Her hand was waving at him....

THREE WERE two men standing on the narrow stoop at the top of the four steps of Mrs. Purvis' boarding house. Mrs. Purvis was shaking her head to something one of them was saying. She looked away and spotted Ted.

"Ted! Did you find Anita?" The faded eyes were wide and frightened.

He had decided, for no reason other than he could think of no other place to go at the moment, to go back to Anita's boarding house. He bounded up the stairs in a single leap. There was no questioning the urgency in the woman's voice.

"Why? What's wrong?"

"These two fellas here said Anita was supposed to wait for them...."

Ted sized them up quickly. One, stocky, middling height, dark-featured, had the look of a mechanic about him. The other was slender, trim, wore shell-rimmed glasses behind which a pair of grey eyes searched Ted's own in sharp scrutiny.

"Look, fella," the one with glasses said. "We don't have time to explain. The lady tells us you're Anita's fiance. Good enough. Did you find her?"

"I asked what's wrong!" Ted's anger surged to the surface.

"We think she's been kidnapped!" The words were explosives tearing at Ted's brain. "Don't waste time. Did you see her?"

"Yeah! Two guys, one big, looked like a fighter; the other, smaller, sharp, clever. The little guy was boss. And now I'm sure the big one had a gun."

The two looked quickly at each

other. Without a word they turned and jumped the steps and ran toward a Plymouth coupe parked a few doors down. The stocky one was the driver. But swift as they were Ted was no less so. He was a step behind the second man as he slid in the coupe.

"I'm coming too," Ted announced. He didn't wait for a reply but shoved himself alongside the other.

The car started off with a speed Ted believed it incapable of. He was rammed back against the seat, then slammed against the door as the driver took the corner on two wheels.

"Where to?" the driver asked without turning.

"Where we spotted them this morning. Jedor has listening head on their office. It's the headquarters all right. Damn!"

"What's wrong?" the driver asked. He was calm, almost casual as he sent the Plymouth screaming around another corner at sixty miles an hour.

"They're armed. It's going to make it harder because they'll kill Areeta if they even dream of pursuit."

"So we'll beat 'em to it," the driver said. "That is, if we don't get picked up by a squad."

"To hell with the squad cars. Let's get to Anita. Which is her name, by the way. What's with this Areeta deal?" Ted said.

"Also her name," the one with glasses said. He pinched a lip between straight white teeth. "Pass me the tele-set...."

Ted looked blank.

"Oh. Sorry. Open the glove compartment."

There was a small box inside, about ten inches long by-six wide by three or four deep. Ted gave it to the other, who opened it and pulled out a something that looked like a hearing aid. Wires ran from it to a panel on which small tubes stuck up like small glass

needles. There was a grill on the near side of the box.

It was a hearing aid, but not the kind Ted had in mind.

THE STRANGER screwed it into an ear, fiddled with the two dials on the face of the panel until suddenly the tubes glowed purple, then lifted the box to his lips and spoke into the grill.

"Jerry-on... Jerry-on... Coming in. Hagars have Areeeta... Hagars have Areeeta. Keep Jedor on the listening head. We're following men who have Areeeta...." The tubes went dark as he switched the dials; the tiny ear phone went back into the box, and the lid snapped down again.

"Thank you," the man said. He gave the box to Ted and motioned for him to replace it in the glove compartment.

"What the hell kind of gimmick was that?" Ted asked.

"Something Manthorp invented. What sort of car did they have?"

"Huh? Oh. Grey Ford tudor, late model. I didn't get the plate numbers."

The driver grunted a wordless something.

"What was that, Manthorp?"

"Nothing, Jerry," the driver said. "There must be a thousand of them. *Look!*

Ted turned and was surprised to see they were on the Outer Drive. He hadn't noticed that the driver had turned into Fullerton Avenue and into the drive. Now he followed the driver's pointing hand. Within sight were six grey Ford tudors. Ted grinned wryly. A fine chance of spotting the others.

The stop light at Oak Street caught them.

It gave Ted the chance he had been waiting for. The questions bubbling

on his lips broke into words: "I'll take your word you're Anita's friends. Okay! But who are the Hagars? Why did they grab her? And what did you mean they would kill her? Why? What has she done? What is all this, anyway? Anita and I have been going steady for five years now, and I don't know any Hagars, or you or your friend, either, for that matter. What gives?"

The light changed and the cop on the corner waved Manthorp to make a left turn. Jerry waited until they had made the turn before replying.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait for the answers. Some of them, well, *all* of the answers are unbelievable. You came along without asking us..."

"I said Anita's my fiancee!" Ted broke in sharply. "So don't give me that guff about coming along without a by-your-leave. If she's in danger why the hell don't we go to the police about it?"

"And tell them a band of Martians kidnapped her?" Jerry asked. He looked straight ahead, as if not wanting to meet the other's eyes.

"Mar-Martians kidnapped her," Ted faltered.

"You see... What is more I would have to tell them about Areeeta and the *plan*, also. We would all end up in an asylum for the incurably insane. This way..."

"This way...?" Ted asked in a hollow voice.

"We have a chance of getting her away. Later, when she is safe, she can explain."

Silence. A well of it. Something into which a man's thoughts fall, swim around in futility and drown. Silence.

"...if you had only stayed back there," Jerry's voice came as from a distance. "But you didn't. You're looking for some clue, a form on which

to hang a belief in my words, but none are at hand. I have to throw words at you and you must accept or reject them. We, Manthorp and Areeta and the Hagars, are Martians. We've known it for five years. You find it impossible to believe because we don't look or talk or act like any preconceived notion you might have. Think! There is nothing in the book which says we can't be. Man's evolution, no matter where it takes place, ends with man as man."

Ted fastened on some of the words. Areeta knew of the Hagars. Why did she go with them, then?

The answer was simple, to Jerry at least: "It seems only we know them. Some strange faculty given us and not Areeta. They must have given her a story she had to believe so she went along. I can't think of any other reason."

Jerry turned and went into a whispered consultation with the driver. They were now on car tracks, Indiana Avenue....

Ted's thoughts revolved on the other's talk. Areeta, a Martian, as were the others. Menaced, like some heroine in a pulp story, by men from another planet. One absurdity added to another. Somewhere there had to be reality. But where? Proof: A portable walkie-talkie of superior design? Nuts! He looked up, suddenly aware they had stopped....

DINGY tenements and huge warehouses; children ragged and dirty, playing intensely, wildly, at their game, were playing hide-and-seek around a grey Ford tudor....

"That's it," Ted said thoughtfully.

"Let's make sure," Jerry said. "Those kids will be able to tell us."

It was the car all right. The children remembered the two men and the

pretty girl who had gotten out and walked into the factory building.

Jerry stroked his long upper lip with his finger while he looked over the face of the building. Manthorp leaned against the peeling brick and scrubbed his nails with his flat thumb. They both looked as if they hadn't a care in the world. Ted fidgeted, his glance darting from one to another, until finally he couldn't take their silence and inaction any longer.

"Well. Do we stand out here and wait for them to come out?"

"No. We don't stand out here, as you say. We go inside. I was just planning what we do when we get inside. The trouble is the description you gave us was not the kind I would have liked to have."

Now it's riddles, Ted thought. Reason was beginning to return. Already he had begun to rationalize his position and those of the two with him. The first suspicion he had that this whole thing was some sort of practical joke had been dissipated in the excitement of the chase and worry for Anita. Now it returned to plague him.

"You see," Jerry explained, "the second man didn't fit. He should have looked like the tall man, who was a Hagar, an Assassin. There is no mistaking the clan whether they are short or tall, lean or fat. They all have that strange flat look in their eyes, the same kind of broken faces, as if someone had been hammering at them. The second complicates matters."

"Yeah?" Ted decided to play along with them for just a while longer. "How?"

"We could handle the Hagars; they are muscle men, and we for the most part have science with us. But if there are others like the slim one, then they have brains among the brawn. Makes the rescue of Areeta more complex."

"I get it," Ted wasn't too successful keeping the irony out of his voice. "They might have ray guns or atomic weapons, huh?"

The caressing finger clamped down and dimpled the upper lip. Then Jerry took it away and looked at it with distaste. "I do think I detect a note of sarcasm, my friend. Please keep in mind that you came of your own volition. If you think it's a game we're playing, why, you've got feet. Use them."

"Yes," Ted got hot then. "I think it's a game! And not so damn funny, either. And don't give me that 'feet' talk because the way I feel right now I'd just as soon punch you in the nose as not. I said Anita's my fiancee. If she..."

Jerry stepped in front of Ted with an abrupt move. He teetered back and forth on his heel, hands thrust deep in trouser pockets. "This isn't a game, as you call it. Murder never is. And it could turn that far. You don't believe us, something which cannot be helped, nor did I expect it. Now you've got two choices. You can go back and wait for Areeta or stay. But if you stay you'll have to take orders from me."

"Why do I have to take orders from anybody?"

Jerry ignored the question. He turned away from Ted and walked up to Manthorp, still lost in polishing his nails. He said something to him, then turned to Ted again. "Okay. We're going in now. Do what you like."

TED'S FEATURES settled into lines of deep, troubled thought. The smooth line of his forehead became rumpled with crooked wrinkles, and his lips turned downward at the corners so that the dimple in his chin

spread across the whole lower jaw.

His lips moved in low speech, a habit of talking aloud he could never overcome: "Sure. The whole thing is some sort of game. And you'd be the dumbest goon to fall in with that Martian talk. A practical joke. And pretty elaborately played. Anita wasn't kidnapped; she went willingly and even said she'd see me later, which only proves it...." A small box in which wires led to a mysterious something within, tubes tiny as glass needles, a hearing aid... The picture of it stood before him suddenly. He shook it off with a physical gesture. "...Nuts! A fake. Just something to make it look real."

But why, came the irritating thought, did they have to go to all that trouble just to convince *him*? He meant nothing to them!

Ted stopped thinking then and went into action.

The heavy door closed gently behind him and he was confronted by a series of steel stairs. He paused, listening for a clue to their whereabouts. Up ahead he heard the faint tapping of their shoes. He took the stairs three at a time. The race ended on the third landing.

They waited for him at the door which opened onto the corridor. Jerry's shrewd eyes searched his face for an instant. Ted shook his head, his own eyes veiled.

"I'll ride along," he said. "And take orders. But only till we get Anita out of..." he was going to use the word "clutches", but instead said, "...their hands."

"Okay. Come on...."

There were only three firms on the third floor. The legend on the frosted glass before which they paused finally, said: *Greyland Co.* And in smaller print, *Electronic Specialties*.

Manthorp's dark brows met over the bridge of his nose. "I don't like that," he whispered hoarsely. "That name. Spells trouble."

Jerry seemed to agree with him. It was obvious he was worried. He kept stroking his chin and shaking his head. His voice was also low and hoarse. "But we've got to trust Jedor's words. He said the outer office had nothing in it except some office equipment and the glimpse he had of the workroom showed nothing of importance. No! I think it's going to be us against them, with maybe a gun as odds against us. Let's go."

Whoever Jedor was, Ted thought, he had been right. A small PBX board, two desks and three stands of files. That was all there was to be seen in the outer office. They tip-toed to the door leading to the workroom. Jerry held up a cautioning hand and listened at the door. A broad smile lighted his face....

Ted placed his cheek against the cool wood. Voices came dimly from beyond.

"...They should be here shortly," one of the voices said.

Ted recognized it. That was the slim one talking.

"...I don't like it," a second voice said.

"...I'm not interested in your likes or dislikes," the first voice spoke sharply on a rising note. "Is she tied securely?"

"...Yeah. She can't get out. I made sure of that."

"...Good! I don't want her getting loose..."

Jerry's eyes narrowed. He shook his head once in a silent signal and motioned Ted away from the door. His hand turned the knob slowly and with infinite patience. He was rewarded by having the door swing silently open.

Confronting them was a barrier of

crates between which a single aisle led to the rear. Light streamed toward them from a pair of windows at the back. They advanced slowly and with caution. Ted had the impression, although it was an obscure one, that a tiny blue light had blinked off on their entrance.

They paused and waited in a pool of silence. Words dropped into the pool....

"...Well. I don't think they'll come. Might as well get rid of the girl..."

Jerry started off first. But it was Ted who came onto the scene first. He skidded to a halt. To his right Anita was tied to a post, her hands behind her back. Directly in front of them stood the two who had taken her off with them. The smaller of the two was standing quite still. He seemed to be waiting for something. The larger one was bent forward slightly, hands in a fighting pose. Then everything dissolved into action.

Jerry and Manthorp dove at the big guy. As though the action had been scripted and Ted were following stage directions, he found himself swinging at the face of the slim one. Only the face wasn't there. Instead, something exploded with sickening force against Ted's mouth and chin.

He staggered backward and shook his head free of the blood-haze which had fallen like a veil in front of him. He could hear Anita's voice though he couldn't make out the words. Then his vision cleared and the face of the other showed clear. The sardonic grin was still on the other's lips and eyes. They demanded taking care of, Ted realized. No one ought to look like that and not be taken care of....

Once more something exploded against his face, the side of the jaw this time. There was a slight difference, however. The shock was not in this punch, for one thing, and for

another, Ted had moved his head slightly. But the important thing was the counter punch Ted had delivered the same instant the other had landed. That counter punch staggered the slim man.

It was all Ted needed. His head crawled down between his shoulders and onto his chest and his arms came up high, just as the boxing coach in college had taught him. And his left leg moved slightly forward and his body weaved easily from side to side. Then he was on the other, rights and lefts stabbing, hooking, chopping. He took also but he wasn't aware of the blows. There was only one thing on his mind, to beat the other into submission. Then, abruptly, there was nothing before him.

ONLY THE sound of Anita's voice: "Ted! Darling! Quickly. Untie me..."

He threw a quick glance over his shoulder as he stopped at Anita's side. The big guy was making it pretty hard on Jerry and Manthorp. He kept dancing away, jabbing and stabbing with both hands. Jerry kept shouting advice: "Get her out of here! Get her out!"

The rope fell away from her wrists. It had been tied rather loosely altogether. Had it been himself who had been tied that way he would have gotten free, Ted knew. He pulled her erect, whispered, "Okay, honey?" She nodded, her face white, her nostrils pinched as though with fear. "Good! Get out now. Stay in the hall... wait there."

Two steps and Ted was at Manthorp's side. Moving swiftly, Ted whirled the little stocky man to one side, then, with the same swift motion, he grabbed Jerry and whirled him out of the way of the big guy.

"My meat," Ted said. "Get 'Nita

downstairs... Hurry up, now..."

The wide flat features were still, and only the pinched nostrils showed the tension of the moment for the big guy. His left hand stuck out a foot from him and the right was cocked, ready to lash out in a hook or cross.

But Ted wasn't interested in boxing lessons. The other man was still out but how long the *status quo* would remain Ted had no idea. Nor was he concerned with it. He had one thought in mind; get this guy out of the way.

He moved in swiftly and surely and the other came to meet him. Head to head they stood and lashed each other with their fists. It was Ted who gave first. But only to gain a second wind. Then he came in again, feinting for the first time. The big guy fell for it and caught a terrific blow to the side of the jaw for his error. It knocked him sideways and back against one of the crates. Ted read in the other's eyes what he intended doing and came in before the hand came quite all the way out of the hip pocket.

TED LASHED the other with a left hook, staggering him again, then pivotted inward and fastened both hands to the wrist of the gun hand. But even with both hands on it Ted was finding difficulty in holding on. And to make it worse the wrist was slick with sweat.

The big guy yelped as Ted bent his head and fastened his teeth in the wrist. The gun dropped to the floor, to be kicked out of harm's way. It was an animal, snarling like one, fighting like one, that fastened his fingers in Ted's hair and pulled backward, bending Ted down with him toward the floor.

Ted's hand went behind him, felt the cloth of the trousers and what lay behind and fastened on to the cloth and flesh and squeezed until his fin-

gers seemed to meet in the palm of his hand. While above him a mewling, sobbing sound rose from the big guy's throat. The fingers in Ted's hair fell away and Ted staggered forward to his feet. He got to the open door and turned for a last look.

The big guy was sitting, head bent forward, fingers clutched about the groin. Above the tortured sob of his own breathing Ted heard the grunted sounds of a man in terrible pain. And from the far end of the room on the wall between the two windows a tiny bulb, like that on a Christmas tree, burned a deep blue....

TED WAS puffing windily as he staggered up to the Plymouth. The children had stopped their game at sight of him. It wasn't till Jerry handed him a kerchief that he knew why they had looked so wide-eyed at him.

Her fingers were on his arm, then one hand stole to his cheek, turning his face toward her. "You're—you're hurt!"

He dabbed at his mouth which suddenly felt three times its size and oddly numb. He looked down and saw the front of his shirt and jacket were bright red. Droplets of blood fell to join the redness. He brought the kerchief up to cover his nose and mouth again.

"...We'd better get back to the others," Jerry said. "They'll be waiting."

Manthorp wasted no time in getting away. Once more they were on the Drive, heading north again. Anita's curling brown hair tickled Ted's chin. Her head lay against his shoulder. A cooling lake breeze dried the sweat on his face, though he felt the irritating wetness of it under his jacket. Once more he took the kerchief away and breathed in shallow gasps. No

more blood from his sore nostrils.

Anita stirred and leaned away from him. "It's stopped. Oh, darling! I didn't know... They said they were members and that they were bringing me to meet the rest."

More double talk, Ted thought. Now she's doing it. Might as well hang on just a little while longer until they could be alone. One thing he knew. They were going to have it out about this foolishness. Getting beat-up this way was not to his liking.

She went on, suddenly conscious of the empty look in his eyes and the set face profiled away from her: "I only learned of it last night, darling. I was going to tell you after I returned."

"Tell me what?"

"That— Well, you're going to find this hard to believe..."

He put his hand on her arm. "Please don't! Don't say it. I'm prepared to lay down my life for you. I mean that's part of formula, I believe. One is supposed to lay one's life down. Or get beaten up or swallow anything handed to him. Formula! But I'm not a formula guy, Anita. And you know that. So don't tell me I won't believe it. Of course I don't. I just think that when a practical joke involves the use of guns and men who would use them it's time those jokes stopped. Speaking for myself, I feel like hell; my mouth is so swollen I find it hard to talk; my nose..."

HE STOPPED and looked toward her to find that she had withdrawn from him and sat curled up in a corner. Her eyes were narrowed and her nostrils had the pinched look of anger in them. The sight of her anger stirred the flames of his own higher.

"...You look mad. What the heck have you got to be mad about? These characters are taking you for a silly,

or worse, foolhardy ride and you're angry. Don't give me that, 'Nita. I'm not in a mood for it the way I feel."

"If you're not in a mood for it," she turned sweet suddenly, "we can drop you off somewhere. Anywhere. But quickly. I couldn't stand the sound of your silly, muffled voice, or the look of that ridiculous nose and mouth for very long, Ted. Really I couldn't. I've been through a very trying time. And I'm trying to act like I'm supposed to though I would rather act a woman and have myself a good cry...."

"Now why don't both of you relax?" Jerry's voice broke in on them.

"And why don't you mind your own business?" Ted asked bitterly.

"From now on it *is* my business," Jerry replied.

"That's a nice cryptic remark. Just like all your remarks. I keep looking for the hidden meanings and wind up beating my skull against a blank wall. Somebody's going to tell me something, provide the code for me, a little later."

"Well! If you'd listen instead of acting the usual bullheaded Ted Malone you might learn something. But not you! The instant someone tries to explain you blow your top. Oh, be quiet and listen!" It was a long speech for her and when she was done she sat back and turned her face away from him.

"I think perhaps it would be best we wait until he meets the others," Jerry said. "We're almost there."

TEAD LOOKED to the right and saw they had parked beside a tavern. A door to the right of the tavern bore the legend *Findley's Halls*. Jerry and the driver got out and made for the door. Ted started to follow but stopped at the sound of the small voice behind him: "Aren't you going to

help me, Ted? Is that it?"

She was still curled up in the corner. She looked like a little girl who had been caught being naughty. Ted shook his head in weariness. It was impossible to stay angry with her. His hand went out to her and she curled her fingers in his and a small smile curved upward from both corners of her mouth.

"All right," he said. "You win. I'll play along the rest of the way."

"I knew you would," she said. "There are still one or two things I don't know, either. I've an idea we'll both know before the day is over."

He looked to the West and saw it would soon be night. "Guess I can wait that long."

The room had no raised platform for the speaker. Just a flat table. A couple of dozen folding chairs were scattered about. Ted's first impression of the group was one of youth, the next impression was of mixture. There was a small group clustered about a wall telephone. The phone was not in use but it was obvious they were awaiting a call. Here and there others sat or stood in small groups of two and three. Altogether, Ted counted eighteen men. Anita was the only woman.

Only the group at the phone remained on the entrance of Jerry and the rest. The others rushed forward and surrounded the girl and her companions. Jerry held out a hand for quiet and said: "She's all right. We got there in time, and thanks to our friend here, we got her out safely... What's wrong?"

Ted had seen their worried brows and eyes and had wondered about the reason for them. One of them, a blond youth in a sport coat fit for any track in the country spoke up:

"Hank Jedor! He's in the hospital.

Someone crashed into his bike while he was listening in on the head. Larry Gregg is with him. That's why we are waiting at the phone. Nothing definite, yet."

Jerry paled at the news and Anita clutched Ted's hand in a quivering grasp.

"So they knew," Jerry said. His eyes were narrowed behind their frames. "One of the two was not a Hagar. There might be more of those. H'mm! We've got to get out of here, that's obvious. Ted Nailer... Over here, fella..."

TEDE FELT a hand on his arm. He turned and saw the face of Manthorp, brows knitted in thought, mouth turned quizzically at the corners, and eyes, oddly observant, peering into his own. "Looks like more excitement," Manthorp said. "Come on. Let's sit for a minute or two. Jerry and the rest will be busy. Might as well straighten you out on things. If I can, that is. Okay?"

Ted saw that Anita had moved toward Jerry and the others. He followed Manthorp to a couple of chairs and fell into one, suddenly grateful that he could sit at ease.

"Hurt much?" Manthorp asked, nodding toward Ted's face.

"I'll live. What's the story? And make it good."

"I will," the other promised. "Jerry's a real brain. But sometimes he goes about things the wrong way. Course I suppose he had no choice as far as you were concerned. We didn't expect you to jump in the car the way you did."

"Tell me, do you read science-fiction?"

"Huh?" You mean those pulp things?"

"Okay. Those pulp things."

"Well, maybe I shouldn't sound so

superior. I remember at school one of the fellas who later got a fellowship at Chicago was always reading one of those paper backs. I never did."

"You know Anita did," Manthorp went on gravely.

Ted's mind went back to one of the minor grievances he had against Anita. She was always reading them. Particularly one called *Startling Fantasy Stories*. They once had a quarrel about it; he had said her mind was too good for that stuff and she had said *his* was too small for it. "Yes. I know."

"I just wanted to get things straight for you, a sort of orientation, as it were. Well, that's how Anita and the rest of us discovered our destiny and who we are."

Destiny... Who they were. Was this going to be more double-talk?

"...We still don't know about Anita, and you'll notice I've been giving her the name you use, although to us she's always been Areeeta. We just know that she very definitely belongs and that at the proper time her place in our orbit will be made known to us. Look. Suppose you were five, and on your fifth birthday you suddenly found a need for an erector set. But suddenly. And on your eighth birthday a need for a chem-set, and on your tenth birthday a need for a child's lab set. And so on until you were twenty..."

Ted opened his mouth to talk but Manthorp held up his hand in a gesture of restraint.

"...I know what you're going to say but let me finish. Then on your twentieth birthday you found that there was only one thing you wanted, a subscription to *Startling Fantasy Stories*. You got the first issue and the first thing you turned to was the Get-together column by Joe Burton. You knew there was going to be some-

thing there of great importance to you. There was. Joe answers all mail. And there it was. A letter from a fan asking would all those who at five got erector sets for their birthday, and eight got... Ah! It's beginning to make sense, eh?"

SOME. BUT I'm still in the dark about this Mars business."

"We'll get there. The letter asked for correspondence. Twenty of us got together. And Anita. Five years ago almost to the day. Matter of fact at midnight it will be exactly five years ago. She came because she said she wanted to meet some of the fans....

"I'm going to skip a bit because we don't have too much time. Now then. Know much about science?"

"No. I'm a business man. Mathematics and economics. I'm a coordinator for a large women's-wear house. I see to it that the various stores in the chain get the proper kind of merchandise to sell. I don't think that has too much to do with science."

"In its own way. Well. I'll try to make it simple. You find it impossible to believe that we are Martians because you've had a preconceived notion on appearances, on the impossibility of space travel and other things. Further, you've been conditioned, by your reading, into a state where you *know* such things are ridiculous. Right?"

Ted shook his head.

"We compared notes at our first meeting and came to the only conclusion possible, especially after Jerry told us of the machine he had designed. Someone, or plural, had broadcast certain messages on the *brain* wave length of twenty new-born children, messages and instructions. Then, at regular intervals, predetermined by the broadcasters on Mars, these messages and instructions would

come to us, unbidden. Understand?"

"I think a certain amount of light has been shed," Ted announced jubilantly. He had been so engrossed in Manthorp's talk he had quite forgotten the others. He turned and saw they were still in a group around Anita and Jerry. He turned back again and went on: "Yeah. I read somewhere that the brain is like a switchboard sending and receiving set combined. It has its own wave length. And, as I remember, the article went on to say that telepathy is possible if we could determine the person's wave length."

"Right. But on the nose! Twenty infants were chosen in an area whose radius is about fifty miles from Chicago. Only these infants had the wave length desired. Now get this. We know the messages came from Mars because..." he paused, took a deep breath and plunged ahead: "The machine Jerry has designed is a converter-beam. It converts matter into energy or light and at the same instant sends that light out into space to be picked up by a receiver which in turns transposes the light into matter again. That receiver is on Mars. A simple mathematical calculation proved that. Now do you believe?"

"I believe. But it doesn't prove you are Martians."

"You should have said, *unless...*" Manthorp was talking faster now. He had noticed the group breaking up. "We were *told* we were. And that the converter-beam is our means of space travel. But I think we'd better get back to Jerry. He's through."

WE CAN'T stay here any longer," Jerry explained. "We'll give Larry another five minutes to call and whether he does or not we'll leave for Ted's place in Lake Geneva."

Jerry and Manthorp wandered off to a corner, leaving Ted and Anita alone. She looked at him, questioningly.

"I feel like I've been entangled in some sort of web," he said. "I—I've never ^{been} so helpless. Just a couple of hours ago I came running over to you. I had the whole thing all set in mind. Anita, I was going to say, will you marry me? Words to that effect, anyway. Now..."

"Now," she prompted.

"Now. Oh. Of course. Will you marry me, Anita? And I don't care if you are a Martian or not. I love you. And..."

Once more she had to prompt: "...And..."

"It won't make any difference whether we go to Mars or get a flat here in town. Just so that we'll be together. Will you?"

"I can't answer," she said gravely. "I still don't know what my mission is, or who I really am. When I learn that I will give you your answer."

"Here we go again," Ted said wryly. "Just being dragged around whether I like it not. I said I'll stick until the end. But I never thought I'd wind up in Lake Geneva."

His last word echoed the sharp ring of the phone. It was the long-awaited call from Larry. Jerry answered and sharp lines of pain and anger were etched in his face as he gave Larry his instructions in a low voice. He turned to the silent group and there was no need for him to talk.

"Hank died. Never regained consciousness. I told Larry to drive out to Ted's place. Well. Let's be on our way..."

ONCE MORE the Plymouth. Ted was beginning to feel a kinship with the small car. It seemed the real part of his life was involved in its

traveling. Now he was going to Lake Geneva in it.

Jerry and Manthorp in the front seat were silent, as was Anita at his side. She shook, as though ridding herself of a physical something. She sighed.

"I have the feeling," she said, "that it's all going to end at Ted's place."

"What do you mean?"

"The final instructions will come to us there. I—I know I shouldn't, yet I have the strangest feeling of dread. As though we are rushing to destruction."

"These Hagars...?"

"Ye-es. And something else. Though they are bad enough."

"By the way. Manthorp explained many things. The Hagars he forgot to explain. What goes with those characters?"

She smiled at the words. "We don't really know too much about them. Jedor saw two of them and that's how we found out they were here on Earth. All we know is that the instant one of them comes into the range of consciousness we are filled with hate and the desire to kill. Jedor told Jerry and another after he had trailed them to that warehouse where they took me. And Jerry and the other also got that feeling."

"Jerry is a leader of some sort. At least he is more advanced than the rest of them. He got the message from Mars. According to him the Hagars are a group of Assassins. And that they were placed here in the same manner we were. He also thinks it is because of me they were placed here."

Ted nodded and turned away from her. They were driving on a car line where there were traffic lights every few blocks. Red lights, green lights, red lights, blue lights, green lights, *blue* lights.

There were no *blue* lights! But

there had been. At the warehouse. A blue light that winked on when a person stood in the open doorway. A signal light.

"Jerry!" Ted shouted.

The sudden sound made Jerry's head turn swiftly toward Ted. "Yeah?"

"Listen! They knew we were coming for Anita. There was a light flashed on when I opened the door to leave. The whole thing was a put-up job. But why?"

Jerry's eyes narrowed in a long moment of speculation. Then his lips clamped shut. "I think I know. They don't know where the converter-beam is. Either they have a listening head and heard or they are following us. In either case it will be a showdown battle. Step on it, pal. We've got to beat them to Ted's!"

THE NAILER place in Lake Geneva was really an estate rather than just a summer home like so many along the shore. The Plymouth wound around a fine-gravelled roadway for a full minute before they came within sight of the huge house set amidst architecturally laid-out rows of flower beds.

There were three other cars in the concrete driveway, one of them the long red-roadster Ted Malone noticed Nailer drive away in.

Jerry explained: "Ted's parents are both dead. We used his place for the construction of the converter-beam because of the privacy." They were walking along, Jerry to the left of Anita and Ted to her right. Manthorp had gone on ahead. "This is really your first visit here, isn't it Areeeta?"

"Uh huh. We drove here one night but I stayed in the car."

Ted felt an unreasoning jealousy. These people seemed to have something in common with Anita which somehow he couldn't compete with. A

planetary companionship....

"Oh. By the way, Jerry," Ted broke in suddenly. "I don't think Anita has had the chance to tell you, but I'm going along on this Mars excursion. One way or another, Anita and I are getting married."

Jerry gave him a sidelong look. The darkness made it impossible to read what lay in his eyes. "So you've made your minds up to it?"

"Ted has," the girl said.

"You mean..." Ted stopped short. His voice was sharp, demanding.

"I mean the same thing I meant before. Until I know who and what I am and why I'm here I can't answer."

And once again Jerry poured oil on the troubled waters: "She's right, Ted. Nor am I saying you're wrong. If things work out well there certainly isn't any reason for our not sending you along with the rest. Let's leave it at that."

Fortunately Ted saw the good sense of his remarks. Besides he was filled with a deep inner excitement now that their goal was at hand. He took the few steps separating them and, as one, the three entered the door to the Nailer place.

Manthorp and several of the early arrivals were in the wide entrance hall, awaiting them.

"Ted's upstairs with some of the fellas," Manthorp announced. "So we go up now or wait for the others?"

"I don't see any reason for all of us waiting. Gil and Harry can wait for the rest and we can go on up. There are some features to the machine I'll want to explain to Ted, who'll have to help me in the operation of it."

The *machine*, it turned out, was on the topmost floor. Ted Malone understood why when he saw the whole upper floor was an observatory. But though he looked about his eyes came back inevitably and finally, to the ma-

chine standing squat and dark, like an unornamented and unpainted Coca-Cola vending machine, in the center of the room.

Jerry had immediately gone up to join Nailer and those with him. Anita slipped her hand into Ted's and said, "Like to have a closer look, honey?"

IT WAS the first word of endearment she had given him that afternoon. He grinned happily and shook his head. The machine was as mysterious at close hand as it was from a distance. A snout-like funnel of what seemed to be frosted glass stuck out for some two feet and pointed straight for the opening in the dome. Beyond the opening a star-speckled segment of the hemisphere of night showed.

"What are you thinking of?" Anita asked, noticing his air of preoccupation.

"I suppose I should give it a trite flavor," he replied. "Something like, I'll wake up and find it was all a dream. No. It isn't a dream, though. Yet there are so many dream-like qualities about it. I've accepted the fact you are all Martians. Then I look around and I see Manthorp, who looks like nothing more than a mechanic, even to the oil under his finger nails. Or that fellow talking to Jerry. Sharp suit, suede shoes, Windsor knot in his tie; he looks like a shoe clerk. Or that other chap alongside Nailer; dark somber clothes, the narrow face of a minister—brooding, intense. Even Jerry; the arch-type of the scholar, with the ever-questioning eyes hidden behind shell-framed glasses." He sighed, then turned to her with a wide grin. "Or yourself. You are the most unbelievable of all. I suppose because I have known you for five years. You're all woman, lovely, wondrous."

"You do say the nicest things," she

observed. "I wonder whether you will forget to say them on Mars?"

"Then you *are* taking me along?"

She turned serious again and he was sorry he had said what he did. But not for long. "Our love has nothing to do with planets. I can't imagine, or would want to, a life without you. Am I being unreasonable?"

He closed the issue with his lips on hers and all the urgency and strength of his love in a kiss. And in the passionate return of her answering caress was the answer to all his questions. The only answer he wanted to hear.

He took his mouth away and, still holding her close, bent his head away from her. "My love, my queen," he whispered.

And from all the others in the room came the echo, "My queen!"

Anita's eyes were wide. He turned his head to follow the line of her glance and let his hands fall from about her. They were all, Jerry, Nailer, every one, on one knee, the right hand extended upward, away from the body, the head bent to the chest, all of them saying again the fateful two words, "My Queen!"

“WE MUST have all received the message at the same time," Jerry said. "The whole thing is now quite clear although, like all the other messages, it's as though it came in capsule form, implanted there to be dropped into the receiver of our consciousness at the right time. We are the chosen ones, brought up to the performance of certain tasks, self-taught in our duties, twenty of us to act as Honor Guard for our Queen Areeta.

"The war is a stalemate. With Queen Areeta in our midst we hold the symbolic trump of victory. The odds will shift to our side on her ap-

pearance. They could not risk her birth on Mars, so implanted the germ of her conception in an Earth woman. These are the words of the message I received."

Ted looked at the slip of a girl he had known for so long. His eyes went wide in awe when he saw the sudden transfiguration which had taken place in her in the seconds of Jerry's talking. It wasn't a physical change but rather one of spirit. Strength, assurance, moral height and breadth, a kind of godliness; all these seemed to shine from her eyes. She was a queen in reality now....

They were all standing now, eyes fastened to her face, awaiting her slightest move, listening for the smallest word.

"My Chosen Ones," she said at last. "My Guard of Honor. It is I who am honored..."

Low murmurs of dissent.

"...The plan is clear, the mission in its last phase. The time is soon at hand."

Time, Ted thought in abstract silence. Symbolic of what? He looked at his watch. Thirty seconds to midnight. Five hours before he had to run up the stairs of Mrs. Purvis' boarding house, in his mind a plan of proposal of marriage. Now he was in an observatory, waiting for something to happen.... His eyebrows hooked down in a sudden V across his nose. The itch of an unbearable something had to be scratched.

He scratched. And paled at what came to his mind. The answers to many questions.... The Hagars had held Areeta prisoner yet had not killed her? Why? Because if she were dead the stalemate would continue. Then they wanted her alive. Again why? But first other things. The Hagar and the scientist with him. The something which had bothered Ted from the be-

ginning no longer did. It was clear now. The scientist had not talked like a man of education at any time. He acted and spoke smoothly, yet not as Jerry, for instance, did, from a scientific background. Words like 'fellas', 'get rid of the girl'. The slim one knew there were strangers in the outer office. He had talked to be heard. By whom?

AND THE Hagar. An ex-pug, may be a bouncer in a tavern in his spare time. It meant nothing or could mean everything. The man had a gun yet had not used it on Areeta. Was he in the habit of carrying a gun for other purposes?

He looked at Jerry. The slender scientist was talking to Ted Nailer again. As if Jerry felt his eyes, the man turned and looked him straight in the face. There was suddenly the muted sound of a clock striking the hour.

...Nine - ten - eleven - twelve. Midnight!

It was all clear now. Everything. There were no Hagars. Thed, King of the Hudars, needed no Hagars. He turned to find Areeta moving away from him, in slow, sleepwalking steps. On her face was a look of utter horror. His hand shot out and grasped her wrist and brought her close again. And at the sullen sound of angry voices he whirled to face them....

"STAND!" he called in strident tones.

"Thed," their voices beat against him. "Enemy! Thed, the King of the Hudars."

"Aye. I did not know until now, until this very second. But one among you knew. Eh, Jerry?"

Light glinted dully from the dark steel barrels of the pistols which had suddenly appeared in Jerry's hands. He was moving slowly toward Thed

and Areeta, smiling all the while.

"The message was implanted within my brain also. But I did not become twenty-five until midnight. Jerry knew, or at least had an idea. For someone was going to appear soon or late. There was no King of the Hudars, one had to be born and on Earth.

"You were all fools, stupid fools!" the man who was once Ted Malone bellowed. "He took you in from the very beginning. He became leader and led you around by your noses. He designed the machine but you built it. He did not have the know-how; Manthorp and the others did. Areeta was not to be beamed to her people, was she Jerry . . .?"

Jerry was at Thed's side now. The guns menaced them all.

"The dirty son-of-a . . ." Manthorp growled. "No wonder we made that trip one night. He said he wanted to make the final adjustment on the beam. Sure he did. The smallest degree off . . ."

"Tell them about the Hagars," Thed continued. "Go on."

"It was rather simple," Jerry's voice was low, conversational. "They accepted my leadership, Mighty Thed." He gave Thed a sidelong look from which nothing could be read. "It was I who told them about the Hagars and how we would know them in our consciousness. I hired a few men, pugs, toughs, and, finally, a smoothie. Jedor saw the tough hanging out in front of the hall and from then they fell in with my scheme like lambs to the slaughter. Imagination, if backed by other factors, is a wonderful thing. Knowing they were Martians made them believe many things not so. But they took my leadership without question, although the simple fact remained that they should have received the same messages I did, simultaneously with me."

"Stupid fools!" Thed bellowed again. He was enjoying himself immensely. He pulled Areeta closer to him. "You should have known the whole plot when Areeta was not killed. The stalemate on Mars would have continued with her death. Even my coming will mean nothing. It is Areeta they want: Right, Jerry?"

"Right! And I think the time is come to place her in the machine, Mighty Thed."

"Don't you think I should go first, Jerry?"

"First Areeta . . . Stand still, Nail'er! That's better. Keep in mind I can kill her if I have to."

THED WAS smiling to himself. The others, watching, wondered at the smile. "First Areeta, eh, Jerry? Then who . . .? Jerry?"

Jerry's lips parted in a twisted leer. He took several backward steps then stepped quickly to Areeta's side but slightly behind her and Thed. "Yes. Then me. The Hudars will have their King, and a Queen to boot. But the King will not be Thed! All right, Areeta. In the machine."

He had unlocked the door of the machine while he was talking and snapped on a switch. Light gleamed from a hidden source and illuminated the interior, and reflected from all the metal and glass within. There were coils within coils, tubes of all sizes, and, last, a two-pronged affair from which wires ran to a board. The prongs were pointed directly at a metal chair placed in the very center of the machine.

Jerry nudged the girl with one of the guns. She seemed frozen to the floor. Jerry growled laughter from his throat. "What's wrong, Areeta? A second ago you shrank from him. Now you don't want to leave his side. It's a shame but can't be helped. I knew

he was to appear some day. That was why I rushed the building of the machine and the kidnapping. I planned this to happen tonight. He came along at the wrong time. Now, come on!"

There was suddenly the blurred sound of voices from the doorway. All eyes turned involuntarily toward the sound, even Jerry's. A half dozen figures stood at tense attention in and out of the frame. And in that second Thed acted.

He left his feet in a dive. Straight at the man with the guns!

There was the dull, booming roar of explosions over Thed's head! But his arms were around Jerry's waist. And then Thed's hand was chopping down at the wrist to his left. Again the roar of pistol fire. Something streaked a line of pain down his side, but one of the guns now lay on the floor.

Thed tried to work his hands up toward the other's throat but someone was pounding his skull with a hammer. Once, twice, and again, the hammer fell against his skull. A familiar red haze fell in front of Thed's eyes. Just one, just one sock at that leering kisser.

There was the confused sound of voices. He was on his hands and knees. Something cold and metallic lay in his hand. He looked up. The figure on the chair within the machine was not clear. He had to shoot, though. Once more there was the roar of a gun—this time it seemed to come from the tips of his fingers. The figure in the chair swayed and a spurt of blood streaked the light jacket. The figure reached forward and closed the door, just as Thed fired again. Too late.

There was the sound of glass breaking. He wondered whether he had shot out a window. He started to laugh. And soft hands and arms cradled his head, warm flesh was pressed close to

him and a voice keened in his ear: "Darling. Oh, darling. You've got to be all right. For me, your Anita!"

SHE WAS bathing his aching skull with a wet rag Ted Nailer had brought up from the bathroom. Manthorp was looking down at him, the usual dark face even darker than its wont.

Manthorp said: "I threw the chair before he got to the switch, wounded as he was."

"And by breaking, the glass cone...?" Ted Malone asked wearily.

"There were direction coils in the cone, like the rifling on a gun barrel. He was dematerialized into light and went off into space. But without direction, a goal, the energy he is now will dissipate eventually into—nothingness!" There was utter finality in Manthorp's voice.

The others stood about, silent and watchful, waiting for something. Ted gave them a crooked smile. He patted Anita's hand, then said: "Jerry told you without a Queen there is a stalemate on Mars. Peace also. I can't stop you from building another machine. Nor from sending Areeta..."

"I won't go!" she broke in.

He continued patting her hand. "But what have we to do with Mars, we who were born on Earth and have lived here all our lives? Let the stalemate remain. It will become a fixed thing. As for me, I want none of it, nor does Areeta. I want to be known as Ted Malone, coordinator for the Gerner chain. And as for her, I want to marry her and live as man and wife with her, not as King and Queen...."

Once more Manthorp acted as spokesman. Nor did the others stop him: "We've all had a very hard day. Why don't you let me take you and Anita home, Ted?"

The Plymouth was riding smoothly.

Anita had her head cradled on Ted's shoulder. Suddenly she sighed. "Did you say you were going to ask me something, Ted Malone?"

"I was, honey. But let's wait until later, huh?"

"Okay. But just keep in mind what happened when you delayed this last

time. Don't let it happen again."

"I haven't forgotten. Slow down, Manthorp. Ah, hah! I thought I saw the sign on our way up...!"

The sign was small, but the letters were big as life: They said, simply, Justice Of The Peace....

THE END *

BLIND

Venusian Bats

By E. BRUCE YACHES

IN ALL GOOD faith astronomers are betting that Venus is covered with a blanket of dense water vapor and clouds. Every evidence of the telescope and spectrometer confirms this. And above all most astronomers are inclined to think that of all the planets in the System, Venus is most likely inhabited by life of somewhat the same order as our own—with one difference. Venusians must be as blind as bats!

That remark isn't intended to be derogatory in any sense, either to the blind or to the hypothetical Venusians. It's simply a statement of logic. Shielded from the sun, with only the vastly dilute light of diffusion, Venusians must have evolved in radically different ways from the creatures of our planet. And yet, we know of creatures on Earth whose organic evolution may be surprisingly similar to the Venusians.

The ability of bats to operate in darkness in the cluttered confines of caverns with a sonic "radar" system strikes us as miraculous, yet it is merely logical adaptation. Certain deep-sea creatures move guided by much the same sort of sonic equipment. It is also known that certain Earth animals have a distinct sensitivity to infrared light, far beyond the visible spectrum.

Experience then shows us a number of ways in which the theoretical Venusians, animals and humanoid, may move about in a world where ordinary visible white light is a rarity. If Venus is primarily sea, as seems quite likely, the marine creatures who constitute the bulk of the living things, may have evolved a sonic visibility efficient beyond anything we can imagine. Perhaps the sonic effect is less, and sensitivity to infrared is the keynote, corresponding in many ways to our ordinary vision.

B-61

The Robot Missile

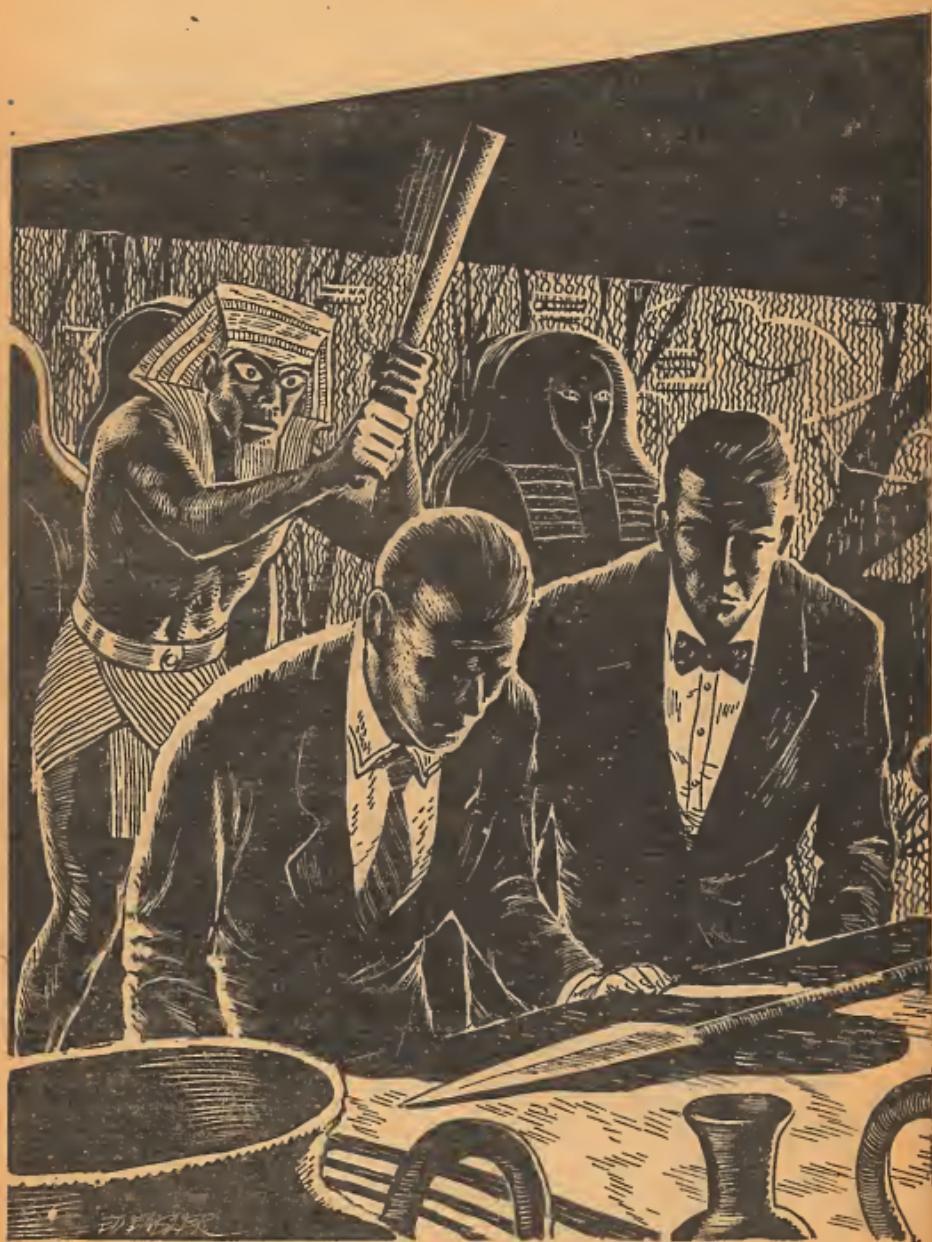
• • • By JOE COONS

VERY RECENTLY, the Air Force, with surprising candor, released information which everyone has suspected, but which few realized had reached the stage of reality. They let it be known that the first guided-missile squadrons had been formed and that they were being trained to use a robot plane called "B-61". Surface-to-surface guided missiles have seen service in the Second World War as V-1's and V-2's, but they were only the forerunners of this highly organized setup which the Air Force is arranging. Today the atomic age has come, in its worst sense—and the prophets of doom may well have something to cackle about.

The B-61 is a jet plane the size, apparently, of a medium bomber. It is spurred by conventional jet engines and needed by rocket assists. Sleek swept-back wings, a needle-nose, and a fuselage outline reminiscent of a V-2 rocket combine to give the new robot an appearance of superb effectiveness. The range must be considerable indeed, and the bomb-carrying capacity must be well within the requirements of the atomic bomb.

Besides its engines, the interior of the B-61 is a maze of electrical and electronic equipment, the latter fed impulses from the antennae protruding everywhere on the ship's surface. Like most guided missiles, the B-61 is expendable and not intended to return after delivering its load, thus indicating that it will plunge into its target rather than bomb-run it as a conventional craft would do. While the drone can be guided either from the ground or from other piloted planes, it is this latter function which will prove most useful.

VISITOR FROM DARKNESS



A deadly light glowed in the mummy's eyes



**The secret of the golden spear
was something Dain wanted very
badly — but not in the middle
of his back on a dark night!**

By ROG PHILLIPS

“TELEPHONE, Mr. Fenton,” Jackson, the bartender, said.

“Man, woman or both?” Dain Fenton asked, as he slid from the barstool.

“Sounds like your pal—you know, the Voice of the Millions,” Jackson said, grinning broadly.

Dain made a slightly obscene gesture and walked stiff-legged to the phone at the end of the bar. The drinks were beginning to take hold suddenly. He shook his head hard, trying to clear the alcohol cobwebs. The phone shook in his grip.

“....Yeah. It’s me, the refugee from gag writer’s cramp. So?”

“Look, Dain-boy. I can’t talk...Explain when you get here. Only make it fast. Fast!” There was an odd note

of terror in Warren Hayward's voice.

Had Dain been a bit more sober he would have noticed the strained quality of the voice, the obvious struggle for control. But liquor had too strong a grip on him. He heard only the petulance. He heard only the odd nuances which had made Warren Hayward's voice a radio beacon for millions of listeners.

"Okay, keed," Dain said. "Be there, fast like a rabbit. That's me, Rabbit Fenton, the punny bunny."

The drink was waiting for him when he got back. So were Hy Samson, Jack Goodal and a few others who made it a point to make any hour the cocktail one. They welcomed him with shouts and ribs; they all wrote radio in one form or another, and their conversation was always sharp, filled with the peculiarities of their trade.

Fenton plumped himself between Goodal and a stranger.

"Who was it?" Goodal asked. He was one of the highest-paid gag-writers in radio, a huge man with an ever-smiling face, and balding skull. He had an odd voice, low, husky, at times inaudible, and he spoke in whispers.

"Mine bosom buddy," Dain said, "Warren Hayward, the voice of prosperity. The rave of the airlanes. Up with the bosses; down with labor; let's all spend like God-damn-it even if we ain't got a dime."

"How come you live with that jerk?" Goodal asked.

"Penance," Dain said. "He did me a favor once...."

Goodal started to say something, and suddenly became aware of the strained look in Dain's eyes, and changed his mind.

"Oh, well," Dain sighed. "Guess I might as well get cuttin'. My Master's voice, you know. Gonna be around for a couple days, Jack?"

"Yeah, I'm flying back to the Coast, so I thought I'd say hello to the boys. See you around, Dain...."

DAIN FUMBLED with his key ring, one hand on the door knob. The knob turned in his fingers. He started to push in, and the most peculiar feeling of impending doom came over him. In an instant, his drunkenness was washed from him. He was cold sober. The saliva was cotton in his mouth and he swallowed hard. Then he pushed at the door. He wanted to turn away, he wanted to run, he wanted to simply disappear; he wanted to do anything except look at the grisly thing on the floor.

He gagged and swallowed hastily and the bitterness of gall flowed to his belly. Slowly, hesitantly, he stepped forward until he was beside the *thing* on the floor.

Warren Hayward had been a handsome man. In any event, he had been good-looking. Now the chiseled features were that literally. His face looked as though a child had hacked away at it with a chisel. One eye had been completely torn from the flesh. The nose had been slit down the middle. The right ear hung by a bloody sliver of flesh. It was the mouth, however, which elicited the most horror from Dain. Whoever had done the chopping had concentrated on it. Both lips had been cut out, so that the teeth and gums lay exposed. Dain took a single shuddering look, saw the tongue also had been ripped out, and turned away.

Got to phone the cops, he thought. Got to get the cops. He walked to the phone in the small ante-room off the outside door, his head bent low. Suddenly he stopped, his eyes riveted on a bright something which lay on the dark red carpet. He stooped, picked the object up and stared unseeingly

at it. His mind, intent on forcing functional processes to the muscles, rejected the materialism of the object, and continued to hold but one idea; get to the phone... Cops! The bright object lay in his trouser pocket. Nor was he aware that he had placed it there.

"....Couldn't have been a knife. Never saw a blade make a hole that wide.... And what a butcher! Damn! Now look, Fenton. We've checked pretty well. You're in the clear. But I want more dope on this Hayward.

"Who and why could have....?"

"Just about a million people," Dain said wearily. He didn't look up at the police Lieutenant. The place was full of department specialists. Fenton had asked the Lieutenant, a man named, Conley, to keep the press out for a while. He and the detective found a spot away from the others and here, in the alcove, they stood and talked.

"How do you mean?" Conley asked.

"Hayward was anti-labor," Dain said. "He was anti-everything. Sometimes I think he hated, well, everybody."

"Whoever did it," Conley said, "hated Hayward. He must have hated the man. The blade in the chest finished him. Why did the killer have to slash and cut the way he did?"

"Don't ask me!" Dain burst out. The shock had passed and anger fell on him. What was this man wanting of him, that he continued this pounding? True, Dain had no love for the dead man, but his feelings had never deepened to anything more than an active dislike of Hayward.

"Hey, Lieutenant!" a voice yelled excitedly.

THEY TURNED as one and saw one of the uniformed men standing at the open door of the bedroom.

It had been closed and no one had thought to enter. Dain and Conley walked swiftly to where the policeman was standing.

"What the..." Conley grunted.

Dain understood how the other felt. There was a man lying on the bed. He was stretched full length on the mattress. And by his side was a spear. The man's eyes were closed and he looked asleep.

Conley moved quickly to the stranger's side, leaned forward, and shook the man savagely. Dain hadn't waited for an invitation to come forward. He was there at Conley's shoulder. A barely audible murmur came from the stranger's lips:

"The golden spear...Sateh-Hop...the golden spear."

Once more Conley shook the other. And this time succeeded in awakening him. The man opened blank eyes, turned them to Conley, and after a second turned them to Dain. There was no recognition in those eyes. There wasn't anything in them. Just a blank look.

"Get up, you!" Conley grunted as his huge paws swept down and gathered a handful of the man's jacket and pulled him to a sitting position.

"Outside, bud," a heavy voice urged Dain and hands took hold of him and shoved him to one side. He turned at the door in time to see Conley drag the stranger from the bed. Then one of the blu-clad cops closed the door.

Dain made himself comfortable while he waited for Conley. He was bound to get to the bottom of this. Soon or late Conley was going to come out of the bedroom. And when he did Dain was bound to talk to him. There was something very odd about the man on the bed.

It was sooner than he expected. The door opened suddenly and a fig-

ure was projected with terrific force into the living room. Immediately following came Conley and two of his aids. They got to the man before he had more than caromed off the wall. Then, while the plain clothes men held him, Conley battered his face with pounding fists.

"Talk, damn you!" Conley belowed. "Talk! Why, uh, did, uh, you, uh, kill Hayward?" He grunted savagely with each blow, accenting his demands.

He left off hitting the man and the stranger sagged in his grip.

"He might talk," Dain suggested coolly, "if you'd stop clouting him."

"Shut up, you," Conley turned on Dain. "I'm handling this."

Dain grinned sourly and clammed up. It wasn't his business. Still it stood to reason that the poor dope wasn't going to talk. But Dain wasn't wise to the ways of police questioning. The detectives got the man straightened out. Then Conley faced him, big hands on heavy hips.

"Gonna talk?" he asked.

SOMETHING impelled Dain to step forward. The police were so intent on their questioning of the suspect they didn't notice the nearness of Dain.

They were holding the man, Conley had his face almost in the other's, and Dain stood at Conley's shoulder. The suspect had his eyes half-closed. Suddenly the eyes opened. There was a blaze of maniacal fury in their depths. Blood dripped from a long cut on the man's lips and his nose was puffed and red where Conley's fists had pounded a tatoo on it.

"He deserved to die!" the man shouted unexpectedly. "I killed him...."

"Why?" Conley broke in.

As suddenly as it had come to life,

so quickly was the wild, mad light extinguished. The eyes became dull, confused, without focus. They looked bewilderedly about, and a confused mumble came from the split lips:

"Kill him...Yes...I understand.... Ah! The Golden Spear.... Satehop!"

And like a balloon collapsing, so too the man. His head rolled forward on lax throat muscles, his knees sagged and the men holding him grunted with the effort of holding his dead weight. It was *dead* weight. For when Conley lifted the head with a savage gesture, it wasn't necessary for the medico's examination for them to see the man was dead.

Patrick Conley watched his men carry the stiff to the sofa. His eyes blazed with a frustrated fury. He had the strangest feeling he was going to scream wildly and bit at his lip to stop it. What the devil had happened? That man hadn't died of natural causes. He was ready to bet his badge on that. And it was such an open and shut case. That spear! He'd never seen anything like it. The blade was of gold, Conley thought. It was the murder weapon all right. The blood hadn't dried yet. But what had killed this guy...?

The fury left his eyes. But the frustration remained. He turned and saw Fenton behind him.

"Ahh! Get the hell out of here," he said. "Only don't get lost. I want to talk to you later."

THE AIR had the chill of early spring, and Dain buttoned the top of his Mackinaw about his throat. He looked up in time to see the lights of the Esquire Theatre go dark. He hesitated on the corner, trying to make up his mind; the tavern looked inviting. His lips twisted in a grimace of distaste. Uh, uh. Better to walk it

off, he thought. His hand went into his trouser pocket for the pack of smokes which lay there, and felt something strange.

It was a tiny spearhead and, although Dain didn't know, he had an idea it was gold. He stepped under a corner street light and looked more closely at it. The pattern was wavy, like that of a Malay knife. There were strange markings along the edge of the blade. He looked more closely and saw that the markings were characters. They looked Arabic, or certainly Eastern in their derivation. He slipped the thing back in his pocket. Should have shown the thing to Conley, he thought, as he started to the boulevard.

The car stopped a few feet behind the tall man in the raincoat, its motor running softly, almost silently. Two men got out and sped in swift pursuit. They converged on Dain from both sides.

There was a savage blow which caught Dain at the back of the head. His head snapped forward. He screamed as fists pounded his kidneys and stars became blazing suns which died in a well of utter blackness as he sank to his knees. He didn't feel the savage kicks one of the men delivered to his ribs. He didn't feel anything. He only heard a voice:

"Quickly, San! Someone comes!"

Then another voice was asking:

"What's wrong, fella?"

And a woman's voice:

"Is he hurt? What happened?"

There were hands helping him to his feet. He swayed slightly, and another voice said:

"Aah! He's just drunk."

But the first voice said:

"Uh, uh. I saw it. Two guys piled out of a car, slugged this guy and beat it. All right, fella?"

The steel bands fell away from

Dain's brain. He shook off the pain and darkness and looked about him. There was a small crowd gathered around him. He smiled painfully and said:

"I—I'm okay. Thanks. Guess I c'n make it from here."

"Sure?" said the one whose hand was steady on Dain's arm.

"Yeah," Dain said wearily. His hand had gone to his trouser pocket. The miniature spearhead was gone.

"Mind if I come along?" the stranger asked.

"I—No. I'm all right."

"Good! Then let's have a cup of coffee. You could use some."

The man was right, Dain thought. He *could* use some. There was a restaurant not far off the corner and the two headed for it. Dain kept feeling the back of his head. There was a bruise the size of an egg at the base of his skull. His side hurt and he could feel a swelling when he lifted his hand to his cheek.

THEY FOUND an empty booth and sat across from each other. The stranger looked at Dain with bright, smiling eyes. And though Dain didn't seem to study the other, he didn't miss a single feature. Not bad-looking, Dain thought, though a little on the short side. Nice build. Damn shrewd face. It was, too.

High, wide forehead bordered by thick, curling black hair, eyes wide, deep and intelligent, a short stub nose, and wide humorous mouth made the face a pleasant one.

"Thanks, fella," Dain mumbled.

"It's all right," the stranger said. "By the way, my name's Wilson. Jed Wilson."

"Mine's Fenton. Dain Fenton."

"Fenton. Say! I know of you. Friend of mine's Sol Saks. Does the Will and Mary show... He told me

about you. But I thought you were with Allen in New York?"

"So Sol's a pal of yours?" Dain said. "Nice, solid guy, Sol. Yeah, I was with Allen. Got pooped out and quit. Gag-writing's not fun for a steady diet."

The waitress came around with their coffee and they drank the brew. Dain accepted one of Wilson's cigarettes and they sat and smoked for a few seconds, before Wilson asked:

"Any idea who those guys were?"
"Why?" Dain asked.

Wilson shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said. "Just intuition. Those guys weren't ordinary strong-arm boys. Of course I may be wrong...."

"Of course you might be asking for something that isn't any of your business," Dain said. But his smile robbed his remark of any sting.

Wilson grinned in reply. "If all the people who ever minded their business were sat end to end, there wouldn't be enough to fill this counter," he said.

Dain didn't hesitate in telling what happened from the very beginning, and Wilson was a sympathetic listener. There was something about the stocky man with the curling hair and odd eyes which impelled the other to talk.

At the end, Wilson ordered another coffee. He didn't open his mouth until he had finished the beverage and lighted a cigarette.

"So. The Golden Spear, and Sateh-Hop. Not a hell of a lot to go on. Not a hell of a lot by a long way. In fact gibberish. Yet no matter how ridiculous, how outlandish, how fantastic a situation appears on the surface, below, there is a reason, a coherency for its existence.

"Now. There are certain salient features which have struck my fancy.

For instance, here is a man who has murdered another. In any other circumstance, a murderer attempts escape. Not this one. He remains, confesses... and dies. But how did he die? What caused his death? You were not far from him. Insofar as you're concerned, he simply folded his blanket and put it at the head of the bed, if I may coin a bad phrase.

"Again. The weapon is lying by his side; he is asleep, or am I wrong?"

"Right," Dain said.

"WHAT KIND of fool is that?"

Wilson demanded, his eyes owlish in their intent. "Don't answer, because you don't have the answer. Nor am I saying I have. But maybe.... Let's go on before I get all bollixed up, though. So Conley questions him and the goon pops his lip about spears and an Egyptian character. Says he had to do it. Now oddly enough we have a situation where one murder is over-shadowed by another. Our mysterious friend who died in mysterious circumstances, is, to coin another phrase, a plot in search of a character.

"Let me go back. I sound like I don't know whether I'm coming or going. Hayward was killed. He called only a short time before his death, and asked you to get there in a hurry. He must have known of the killers coming for him, and wanted to tell you something. Now it was either all in his mind or on some written record. If it's a written gimick, the cops will find it and the solution is all but in the bag. But I've got an idea that it isn't. I have an idea that Hayward only just got wind of something, didn't attach too much importance to it, and got bumped before he could spill his guts. Right?"

"You're too fast for me," Dain said.

"But on the whole, you've stated the

case pretty well. Now what about the guys who slugged me?"

"So. The guys who slugged you, eh? H'mm! They *knew* you had the miniature spear. But *how* did they know that? You were alone. In fact *you* didn't know you had it until you reached into your pocket. Okay. By the way, how did you manage to escape the press?"

"That wasn't hard," Dain said. "I acted like a tough cop. Said Fenton would be out soon as Conley was through with him. Just like that."

"Tell me," Wilson said, "what's your opinion of this thing?"

"Opinion? Ha-ha! That's a laugh! Look, fella! I don't walk into my room every night and 'find murder.'"

"But I do," Wilson said. "I write all about the blasted things. I'm a pulp hack. I deal in blood and adverbs, if I may coin a phrase. Y'know, to me, if I didn't know better, the whole business is a pipe dream...."

"If—you didn't know better?" Dain said hesitantly.

"Yep. Fate, or whatever you want to call it, must have pushed me into your lap. I know you're damn nosey as to why I'm so interested, because my curiosity is obviously deeper than ordinary prying. Look!"

Dain looked down to where Wilson's right hand was partly concealed by the edge of the counter. His eyes widened when he spotted the shining thing which lay in the palm. It was a tiny spear, of gold or brass, judging from its brightness. His eyes swept up to meet Wilson's.

"Get it?" Wilson asked.

"Uh, uh."

"I was in one of these deals too. Only mine makes less sense than yours does. Because, foolish as any reason we pick for Hayward's death, it could make sense. But for Gordie's death, there is no reason."

"Gordie? Who's this Gordie?"

"**G**ORDIE," Wilson explained, "is, or rather, was, Gordon Walsh, a bookseller. He had a place over on North Avenue near Wells. A harmless old guy, Gordie had one love. Books. They were his passion. I used to come into his joint late at night, with a bottle usually, and we'd sit and chew the fat. Gordie had a wonderful critical faculty. Besides, he was one of those rare Irish wits, the kind like Whistler or Shaw. He loved books so, he hated to sell them. And every now and then, when he got a customer who was interested in buying something Gordie treasured, the gooey Irishman would try to talk him out of it.

"It happened about two weeks ago. I came into his place, well, up to it, and I saw a couple of squad cars parked before it. A cop was at the door. He tried to stop me from going in but I just shoved past him. There were quite a few of the law in the store. Your friend Conley was there, too. He wanted to know who I was, so I told him. He seemed to be satisfied. At any rate he let me see Walsh. The description of your friend's body could well be that of Walsh.

"There were no clues. Nothing.

"A week later, Walsh's lawyer called me. That old Irishman had willed me the store and his stock of books. I went down, got the key and opened up the shop. The place sure was empty, if you know what I mean?"

Wilson sighed deeply, and continued:

"I browsed around, picked a book up off one shelf, moved to another, lifted a book here and there, and all of a sudden I got the damndest feeling. It was as if I were being watched. I turned toward the corner from where I thought the mysterious eyes were on me, and of course nothing was there.

But the discomfort remained. I couldn't take it any more, after a while. I was standing with a book in hand. It was reflex. I shoved the book in hard, too hard. And it fell behind the shelf. But coincident with its fall, there was a clattering sound, as if a metal object had preceded it. I managed to crawl behind the shelf...."

He showed the spear to Dain again.

"....This is what I found."

"But that doesn't make sense," Dain said.

"A bright boy," Wilson said sharply. "He says it doesn't make sense. Don't parrot me. What I want to know is what could a harmless old coot like Walsh have to do with spears and gibberish?"

Dain's mind was racing like mad. He somehow couldn't make anything of Hayward's, but Walsh's murder could give a clue. He was a book-seller. Therefore he carried a queer assortment of things. Perhaps in one of those volumes lay the secret.

Wilson looked thoughtful at Dain's idea. It could well be. As a matter of fact, he remembered seeing some very odd curiosa, occult stuff, bibles, and plain looney writings. But there must be hundreds of such volumes.

Suddenly he snapped his fingers:

"Look! We're dopes! Egyptians. Or something like one. Sateh-Hop! It's an idea. I've got the key. Let's go."

THERE WAS a chili parlor still open, and the taverns on two of the corners were still doing business. Wilson inserted the key and twisted the knob. He muttered an imprecation, as something seemed to stick. Once more he twisted the key in the lock. This time the door swung open.

"Stay behind me," he cautioned. "I know my way."

Dain trod on the other's heels as he moved ahead. In the dimness, Dain

perceived the outlines of a wall. His eyes accustomed themselves to the dark and he saw more; a long narrow store, counters along the center which made aisles down which the customer would walk, and at the end a long, single counter, the width of the back wall. Wilson had that counter as his goal.

There was a wall switch at the far end. Wilson snapped it on and light blossomed from a fluorescent canopy. The stocky figure knew its way about. Wilson gestured for Dain to step to his side. There were labels above each section of books. The entire lower section of the rack held books labeled "Esoterica".

"I'm making a blind guess at things," Wilson said, "but I think, if I remember right a something Walsh once said, that we'll find at least the shell of a clue in this shelf."

There were strange titles, musty-smelling, wrinkled-leather volumes, some looking as though they hadn't been touched for centuries. There were slender volumes of poems, thick volumes of occultism, bibles of every sort, and a single row of translations from the Eastern world.

Wilson went down to a squat and ran his finger across the titles. Dain joined him and watched, with an odd detachment, the stubby finger as it raced across the leather backs. Suddenly it halted. Dain read the title *Curiosa Egyptii*.

"Hey!" Dain ejaculated. "It's in Latin."

"I hope not," Wilson said, as he pulled the volume from its place. "I can't read it."

Dain could have said, nor can I, but forebore. He peered over Wilson's shoulder as the other opened the cover and flicked the first pages open. The writing was in English.

"Let's get it over to the desk," Wil-

son said, arising from his squat. Dain followed him to the back counter. Wilson spread the odd volume wide and they bent over it. And as though by magic, the light died in the fixture. It was as if by magic, because there wasn't the usual flickering attendant on the going out of fluorescent lighting. One second there was light, the next, there was terrible darkness.

Terrible. That was the word Dain thought of. It wasn't the pleasant darkness of night on a city street, or night on a lake. It was impenetrable ebony. It was night without end. It was terror rolling in waves to greet them. And with the darkness, there came to the room a peculiar damp, as of an opened tomb.

There was more, a feeling as if someone or something had entered. Dain felt the hackles rise. He stepped closer to Wilson; he felt the sudden desire for the nearness of the other. And Wilson, too, experienced the same thing Dain did.

Wilson's voice came in a thick whisper:

"What's wrong? What happened to the lights?"

"Ssh!" Dain hissed. "Listen!"

But there wasn't the slightest sound. Dain felt the thin hair at his temple move, as though by a breeze. Yet the door to the outside remained closed. Terror washed over him in clammy waves. And there was nothing concrete on which he could base his terror. There was the nothingness of a horror unseen yet felt.

DAIN FELT warm breath against the lobe of an ear. It was Wilson coming close to whisper again:

"Something's up, Dain. Careful."

But they seemed rooted to the spot. As the seconds ticked by Dain felt anger rise in him. The whiskey he had drunk had long ago dissipated its ef-

fects. He was cold sober. Damn it or them! He wasn't going to be either bluffed or frightened any more. His hand stole toward where his lighter lay. Just as he pulled it free a voice, deep, strong, in the room, yet sounding as if it weren't, said:

"The Golden Spear. It is in the room! Sateh-Hop has need of it."

The first manifestation of something concrete.

"So tell him to come and get it," Dain heard himself declare.

"Oooh," Wilson moaned suddenly.

But Dain had also seen it. A weird something, a ball of greenish fire had come to life. There was something alive in the center of it, and as it rolled toward the two men, the ball grew larger until it seemed to fill the whole room, and as it grew larger, so did the something alive in it grow larger, until they saw what it was.

It was a man. Tall, clothed in a white robe, a diadem of gold about a fair, wide brow, the man had a face that was like a combination of devil and angel. Gradually the figure and face became more clear. They saw the eyes, deep-set, intense, with strange lights piercing from the deep sockets in which the orbs were; they saw one hand stretched straight out, and saw that the hand was holding the shaft of a spear, a spear which they had both seen before in miniature. He stood still and the ball came forward.

Dain found himself backed against the very wall of books. There was nowhere else to go. And still the greenish stuff rolled forward.

"I speak for Sateh-Hop," the figure said. "One of you has the Golden Spear. It can do you no good. Place it on the counter."

"To hell with you!" Wilson shouted. Dain hadn't noticed that the other had picked up a book.

WILSON had hurled the book straight at the greenish ball of light. The book disappeared into the heart of the light. And a startling thing happened. The ball and figure vanished in a puff of acrid-smelling smoke. Again there was the magic of the lights. Only this time they came on.

Dain sagged wearily against the counter: his whole body was soaked in perspiration. It stained his jacket and trousers, and made wet patches on the armpits of his shirt. As for the stocky Wilson, he seemed carved from rock, immobile, face stonily blank of emotion. Only in his eyes was something. It was hard for Dain to place his finger on what he saw in the other's eyes.

Wilson turned to Fenton and for the first time saw the utter weariness of the man. He realized then that the other was in no condition for more, that he had undergone a severe strain. Further, by Fenton's own admission, he had been drinking heavily all that day.

"Guess we'd better call it quits," Wilson said. He smiled somewhat grimly and turning, reached for the book. "Hey...!" his voice held complete disbelief.

The book had vanished!

"Let's-let's get out of here!" Dain muttered harshly. His voice was at the breaking point.

"Okay. Easy, fella," Wilson said assuringly. "Easy does it. We're gettin' out of here all right. We got some walkin' to do. Let's go...."

They walked for a long time, neither breaking silence, Dain because his mind seemed emptied of thoughts by the terror of the night: Wilson because he was trying to place each of the strange happenings into a category, an index from which, later, he could pick and choose at will.

"By the way," Wilson said as they waited for a light to change at Fullerton, "where are you going to spend the night?"

Dain looked at the other blankly. He hadn't thought about where he was going to sleep. Sleep had been furthest from his mind. Naturally he was going to sleep home, he said.

"Well," Wilson said, "the joint might be full of cops. And then, maybe you'll get to thinking about your ex-friend...."

"He was never a friend of mine!" Dain broke in savagely.

Wilson gave the other a sober, questioning look. But he didn't ask the other anything. Instead, he said gently:

"Come on up to my place. I've got a three-room furnished.... Y'know what they say about misery....?"

Dain liked Wilson's place the instant he stepped across the threshold. Though he had lived with Heyward for three years in their flat he had never quite felt at home. Here, on the other hand, it was as if he had known its warmth for a lifetime.

"Make yourself at home," Wilson said. "I'll rig up a snack. Snacks are something I'm most fond of. After that, food. At any time. Me and my belly are the best of friends."

Dain slid along the length of the Hollywood bed, pulling out one bolster for his head, another for his feet, and watched his new-found friend pull out the door to the Pullman kitchen.

Wilson busied himself at the icebox. He called over his shoulder:

"Like a pipe? Right alongside the bed. Books are on the wall...."

BUT DAIN was content to just lie there and watch the other prepare the food. After a moment Dain turned to give the living room a more comprehensive going over. There were a

couple of nice prints on one wall. Wilson had had a carpenter come in and fix up a floor-to-ceiling bookcase. It extended from the door leading from the entrance of the living room all the way to the windowed wall opposite the entrance. By simply turning his shoulders, Dain could select any of the books. He glanced idly at some and saw that they had been privately bound, some titled *Fantastic*, others *Western*, others *Mysteries*, and a couple of thin volumes marked *Amazing*.

"....This the stuff you write?" Dain asked.

"Yep. Other stuff too, but my living is made in pulp. Like paprika?"

"Huh?"

"With your eggs? Gives 'em a nice flavor. Tried my hand at the slicks once. Made a couple of sales, but didn't go for that girl-meets-boy deal. There's dough in it. But hell! There's dough in being a salesman for someone, too."

"That's funny," Dain said drily. "I write gags for a living. People have an idea a gag writer has to be a funny character. It's hard to be a comic with ulcers. But what I wanted to bring out was that we don't think about the sponsor or his product. There are taboos we observe. Yet few of us think of those taboos with a sense of moral right. I wonder how many of us would write the way we do if we had a stronger sense of social consciousness?"

"There are a couple," Wilson said. "Henry Morgan started that way. Now it's a gag. But in the beginning.... I can think of a couple of others, Phil Sharpe, Sol Saks, Aaron Rubin. But on the whole...."

"Sure. Ed Gardner too. But money made the way we make it does peculiar things to us. I'm, well, second-rate. Yet I made a neat sixteen thousand last year. So this summer alone,

as head writer on Benny's replacement show, I'll do twelve grand. I'm just bringing this up to show how much money is involved in the editorial end alone. Agencies do a couple of million dollars with one account when it comes to radio. That is, the large accounts. A guy can't think of social consciousness when millions are being spent. Not when it can affect his livelihood."

"And what about Heyward?" Wilson asked.

"Heyward? Heyward was a rat!" Dain said vehemently.

"You're speaking personally now. He did a news commentary five days a week for one of the largest soap concerns in the world. I used to listen regularly to him in the beginning. I've got to admit the change in his broadcasts was so gradual that it wasn't until he became a rabid labor-hate character that I noticed his liberalism was gone. The guy was clever with words. Would you like to hear how clever....?"

DAIN RAISED himself on one elbow. The realization that Wilson had been leading up to something dawned on him suddenly. All this talk about radio personalities.... Dain watched Wilson closely as the short man stepped to a radio-phono combination and put in on. From a cabinet Wilson took a spool of wire.

"Got a wire recorder from Sears when they came out," Wilson explained as he removed the spool on the spindle and replaced it with the one he had removed from the cabinet. "Listen."

....The U. N. circus is becoming more and more funny as time goes by. In the beginning it was a three-ring circus with the Soviets, Great Britain and the U. S. holding the spotlight. Now every nation has its own

ring. The atom bomb has made equals of large and small alike. Jugoslavia says she will never forget or forgive the slights of Italy. And Italy rants that France still holds African possessions, why shouldn't hers be returned? And France, the broken-down old Mademoiselle, still thinking she is the cultural center of the Universe, says that Germany once more threatens her borders. Need I go on? But I must. There is but a single nation whose preordained destiny to rule the world is without question. I speak of the United States of America! No other, large or small, has contributed so much to world welfare. We can throw out the history of the past hundred years. They are but musty old pages in an ancient book. Today, power is to that nation who has the most of it. Yesterday, we heard the honorable gentlemen from the East speak their piece. Warning us that the East was the cradle of civilization, and that from the East may come the funeral cortege. Let them try to let loose those hidden arts and terrors they have resurrected. We have means of retaliation...."

"Well, Fenton," Wilson asked, "does that make some sense to you?"

"Holy cats!" Dain Fenton was aghast at what he'd heard. "Why that character was the blackest kind of nationalist!"

"Never mind that," Wilson said sharply. "I knew that from previous broadcasts. What do you think about the 'hidden arts and terrors' business?"

"Ooh! I get it. You're referring to the threat from the East. It's a lead...."

"Now look, Fenton," Wilson said slowly, carefully, giving each word an instant of weighed measure, "does any single instant, or many, come to your mind when Heyward slipped and per-

haps unwittingly gave his hand away?"

Dain tried to erase every thought from his mind other than those the short man sitting alongside him wanted him to have. But it seemed impossible to concentrate. Heyward had been a queer duck. Antisocial, he had been prone to heap calumny on anyone who attempted to pry open the lid of his secretiveness. Dain had a thoroughly normal sense of curiosity. Yet insofar as Heyward had been concerned, Dain had made it a hands-off policy. Wilson stared in surprise as Dain broke into unexpected laughter.

"What's so funny?" Wilson asked.

"Us," Dain replied. "Boy, we're regular little Orson Welleses. Supernatural things happen, balls of greenish phosphorescence, which appear and disappear mysteriously, humans who do the same, murders in which no human agency other than someone who acted as an agent, and who is himself later murdered by I don't know what, all these things occur and what do we do? Why bless our little....we pass them off as though they were everyday deals."

"Okay, gagman!" Wilson said bitterly. "So explain them."

"H'm! You got me, mah fran', by the proverbial short hair. I can't even begin to imagine the how or why. But you're the lad what punches with the pulp. What's your idea?"

"That's why I'm asking you if Heyward ever dropped anything that may have sounded queer. Good God! Didn't he ever take a drink or act normal and spill a confidence?"

"WA-IT A minute," Dain suddenly was sober in remembrance. "There was one night, when Heyward came home and.... Sure! It was that night when we threw a ball at the

Allerton House for Bill McGivern. It must have been four in the morning when I staggered up to the door and tried to pour myself through the key hole. Anyhow, I was maybe home ten minutes before I noticed that old rat-puss was still out. If I remember straight, I had a half-hearted hope he'd been hit by a truck or something. Not very much after, he came home.

"I wasn't sober, mind you. I was still in that groping-for-things stage. Yet on his entrance, it was as if someone had given me a cold shower. You didn't know Heyward. Well, he was one of these tall stoop-shouldered men who were a little near-sighted and too vain to wear glasses. He'd bend close and peer into your eyes with those snake-cold ones of his. He had a too-lean face. And there was always a nerve ticking away along the line of jaw. I sometimes wondered whether or not he took dope, because he had the quick nervous temperament of a neurotic, giving way to sudden periods of calm elation. This was one of those nights when he was high.

"He closed the door quietly and moved toward me with his face in a lop-sided grin. His weak eyes had the darndest light in them. I'd have sworn he was nuts at that moment...."

Dain shook his head violently in recollection and went on:

"He started to talk in that peculiar voice of his.... Wilson, that man had a voice that could have charmed a snake. There was something magnetic about it. Something which made a listener, any listener, strain to get the smallest syllable. He said, close as I can recall, 'Dain, I'm going to blow the world off its feet one of these days.'

"I looked at him with my chin hitting my chest and not saying anything. He came close and grabbed hold of my shirt until I thought he was going

to rip it from my back. 'I talked to a guy tonight who's the biggest thing that ever lived. And I don't mean in size. And he wants me to be his man, Friday. I said sure I'd do what he wants. Who's got the biggest listening audience in the country? Me! I make guys like Heatter and Winchell sound like soap-box orators. That's why he wants me. He wants I should lull the people to sleep. Prepare for his coming....'

"I remember jerking loose and telling him to put out the pipe. That he'd set the joint on fire. He walked away and he was still grinning. That was the last I heard of it...."

Wilson leaned back against the bolster and folded his hands across his belly. His under lip stuck out and began to caress the upper lip. His eyes had a far-away look. Fenton lay back and looked up at the cocoa-colored ceiling. After a moment Wilson said:

"He never told you the man's name? Where he met him....?"

"Nope."

Suddenly Wilson threw his hands wide, yawned and said:

"Okay. Tomorrow's another day. Might as well hit the hay. I'll bring bedding out...."

THERE WAS an antique shop on the first floor of three twenty-nine State Street. The windows were dust-covered and in need of a washing. The name, in what had once been gilt lettering, read *Hasjian, Antiques*. The upper two floors displayed windows which were caked with dirt. It had once been a small hotel. In fact the sign on the door to the left of the antique shop's entrance still bore a barely decipherable *Gomez Hotel*.

The new Ford tudor pulled up before the antique shop and the driver and the man alongside both got out. They walked into Hasjian's, a bell

tinkling somewhere in the rear to announce their arrival. They walked straight back, between the aisles made by dusty bric-a-brac, silk and metal screens, sofas whose once-new frames had been covered by fine brocades but which were so stained not even their design could be made out. One of the men, the shorter, slimmer one, bumped against a chest-high vase and for a second the vase teetered back and forth on its base. He steadied it with a muttered imprecation. His companion continued, as though he hadn't seen what had almost happened.

There was a partition separating the rear of the store from the front. For a door a curtain of strung beads had been placed protectingly before the rear. They reflected the little light which somehow seeped to the rear and made it almost impossible for anyone to see behind their strands. They gave a slithering, sibilant sound as the two men parted them and stepped through.

The rear was surprising in the lack of impedimenta after the great amount in the front of the store. There were a few crates, empty, a half dozen chairs in various gestures of disrepute, a table with three legs missing, several picture frames leaning disconsolately against the wall, and a dusty daybed. Jammed against the daybed was a small nightstand. On it an ashtray still held a smouldering cigarette....

"....I wondered how long it would take before you two showed up?" said the man on the bed.

He was lying, his head to them and his feet on the metal head of the bed. He was looking into a mirror placed just below the ceiling and tilted in such a manner that he could see whoever stepped through the outside door. There was a narrow slit of opening between the top of the bead-curtain and the moulding which permitted him

a clear view without stirring.

He reached over and lifted the cigarette and took a last drag from it. The odor of the tobacco was fragrant and full Turkish. He turned his head slightly and said:

"Well? Have you lost your tongues? Do you have it...?"

The taller of the two stepped forward and shoved the nightstand to one side, and sat on the edge of the bed. His set features gave no indication of what went on in his mind. He placed his closed right fist on the stomach of the other and opened it. The one lying there smiled at sight of the object in the open palm.

"Fenton has been taken care of, I hope," he said.

"Enough so that he won't bother us. He never knew what hit him or even what happened. And now....?"

Suddenly the one lying came to a sitting position. He did it so quickly the one on the edge of the bed almost slid off. There was a ring of metal as the object the other had displayed fell from the fingers and struck the linoleum.

"And now we break up," said Jorje Hasjian. "Our work has been done. Now we must go to the greater task. Five years we have been here. It was enough.... But there won't be any more of these fake art dealings. Have Agra call the truckers and we'll break up shop tonight...."

THE OTHER arose and walked out; the shorter, who had never spoken, following as silently as a shadow.

Hasjian picked up the spear point and placed it in his pocket. He looked with morose, jaundiced eyes toward the still swaying bead curtain and, after an introspective second or two, turned the light out and followed the first two.

They were awaiting him at the curb.

"Ahmed...." Hasjian called to the driver. "I'll take the train out to the temple. We will all meet there Wednesday...."

Ahmed looked up as if figuring the days. "Wednesday, eh? Well, this is Monday. Yeah. We ought to be through. Okay, Jorje. See you then. And don't worry. Agra and the boys will do a good job."

"I'm not worried. Not any more," Hasjian said, his mouth agrin.

Daylight was close to the point of forenoon before the two men awakened. Wilson made a brunch of sorts and they ate in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. Dain Fenton felt the stubble along his chin and mentioned he needed a shave.

"Bathroom," Wilson said laconically. "Razor, soap and brush there. Me, I shave when I feel like it, the privilege of the artist...."

Dain laughed in a grunt. "Artist! Hell! Laziness makes any excuse."

"Not today, my friend," Wilson said wearily. "Or at least not till later. I'm not in the mood for being gag-fodder. Where are you bound for?"

"Agency, M. C. A., I mean," Dain replied. "That's the why of the shave. I'm one of the few well-dressed, the immaculate, writers on radio. Always figured television would get here one day. Got to keep myself presentable in case the gagman I work for decides to show us off."

Wilson laughed in derision. "Pretty boy Fenton they'll be calling you if you don't take care. Well, good luck."

"Thanks! But I've already got a summer replacement. Remember? For the Benny show?"

"That's what I mean, good luck. Summer replacements are tough, I hear. Do you *have* to go to M. C. A.?" the last was said in a shout. Dain was already in the bathroom.

He reappeared, brushing away with

the soaped-up brush. "Why?"

"Well, I was thinking about that book, *Curiosa Egyptii*.... There's a dealer on Rush Street who might have something like it. Thought you might like to walk with me."

"Hey, Jack!" Dain turned and stepped back in the bathroom. "I'll dig that."

Luck favored them with smiling face. The dealer not only had the book but the same one which had so mysteriously disappeared the night before. Wilson dished out the three and a half dollars the man wanted and he and Dain walked over to the B/G restaurant which was on the corner. They found an empty booth and sat side by side, the better to read.

IT WAS A slender volume written in an old-fashioned manner, dry as the dust of the age it dealt with, and filled with many odd surmises and conjectures. The last part of the book dealt with obscure historical features.

"Wow!" Wilson suddenly exclaimed. "I-I think we've fallen into something..." Dain, who had been doing his best to follow Wilson, who was a sight reader and could read paragraphs at a time, leaned back, smiled at the other's enthusiasm, and waited to hear what so excited Wilson. "...Listen! 'And so a son was born to the Pharaoh, the last of the Hotops. For did not the soothsayers foretell this event? They named him Sateh-Hop. Sateh-Hop's mother died in his birth, as the soothsayers had also foretold. Then did the Pharaoh call in his architects and bid them construct the temple of his departure and make ready the chambers of the dead and the to-be-alive'.... Get it, Fenton? The 'to-be-alive'?"

"Not yet, you ape," Dain growled. "But I've got the feeling. Go on—"

"Yeah.... 'And so in the fortieth

year of his reign was the temple constructed and into it went Sateh-Hop for now he was Pharoah, the last of the Hotops and from henceforth must come a new line of Pharoahs. And with Sateh-Hop there went his physicians, his architects, his mathematicians, his scientists, and his personal guards to the number of two hundred men. All in all three hundred and eighty men were entombed in the vast underground temple, the *pyramid-in-reverse*.

"And with them were taken all the machines which were constructed, the space machines, the vessels of eternal life, the weapons which the soothsayers had foretold would make Sateh-Hop master of the world in that age to which he would be recalled...." Wilson's voice was hoarsely excited as he read the last line.

Dain's glance held utter disbelief. His voice too: "Hey! Wait a second! You don't mean you believe this gibberish, do you?"

Wilson's mouth twitched in a grimace which tried to be a smile. "Believe it? Fenton! After last night do you mean to say this doesn't make sense?"

Dain wet his suddenly dry lips with a tongue that was like sandpaper. Deep down he knew he believed. But if he confessed openly, it would be as if he denied sanity, the world of reality, and accepted witchcraft, the belief in spirits and reincarnation. Yet the ball of fire he had seen, the words he had heard.... They came back in a flood of memory, 'I speak for Sateh-Hop....'

"Yes," Dain said at last. "I believe!" And as if he had broken through the dam of his mind, the dam which any normal person had before superstition and disbelief, the words came faster, "This *pyramid-in-reverse*. Weren't there, and aren't there at the

present, whole treatises on what can be found in some pyramid or other?"

"Yeah!" Wilson said. "But they've always thought it had reference to another. Let's forget that. Concentrate on this. You didn't see the goons who slugged you last night. But I did. They were grease-ballish-looking guys, dark-skinned, black hair, tight suits. Only gypsies or a certain kind of character I know would wear their hair like they did, or their clothes. Syrians of a certain kind. There's a whole colony on the West Side.... H'm! Let's go back to this dealer who sold us the book. I want to ask him something."

THE BOOK dealer was a baldish man in his late fifties. He wore steel-rimmed glasses over which he peered in near-sighted discovery at the two men before him. He was also a bit deaf.

"Eh? What was that, young man?" he asked.

Wilson patiently repeated his question:

"Did anyone else ever ask for this book in particular?"

"Ohh! Yep! That's why I got it. Was looking over a buy in someone's rooms one day and saw the book among others. H'm. Matter of fact, day before yesterday. Bought the whole lot for five bucks. Had a couple of good titles among them. Good buy it was. Yes, sir."

"Yes. I imagine it was," Wilson said. "This man, the one who asked for the '*Curiosa*', did he leave his name?"

"Yep. Jorje Hasjian, 239 State Street," came the astonishing reply.

"But didn't he offer a fabulous amount for the book?" Dain threw in.

"Damn fool if he did," the man said. "Must be three, four thousand

copies around. No. Just asked me to get it. Said he'd be by next day. Never showed up. That's why you fellers got it."

They thanked him and left. The address was fresh in Wilson's mind. He saw and hailed a cab as they stepped out of the door.

"Where you going?" Dain asked, as Wilson took his arm and steered him toward the cab.

"To see this Hasjian," Wilson said.

The answer did not surprise Dain Fenton in the least. But the why of it puzzled him. What did Wilson expect to get out of the man?

"I don't really know," Wilson said. "We'll have to see the guy's reaction. And act accordingly."

Dain leaned back, hauled a pack of Tareytons from his trouser pocket and, offering one to Wilson, lit up his own and his companion's.

"Tell me, Wilson," Dain said as the cab crossed over the new bridge over the river. "Do you think Hasjian and Sateh-Hop are related in some way?"

"No," Wilson said, after turning to see whether Dain was kidding or not. Dain was serious, though his words could have had a double meaning. "Matter of fact I think Hasjian is an enemy. Which does not mean Sateh-Hop is a friend. I think they are working at opposing ends."

"Further, Sateh-Hop knows nothing of Hasjian, and I think Hasjian does not know the Pharaoh has come back to life."

"What makes you say that?"

"The attack on you last night. The spears mean something, have some significance known to both. Yet if Hasjian and Sateh-Hop were aware of each other, two methods would not have been used to get them back. Do you follow me?"

"Yup! Though we are taking Has-

jian for granted as the leader of this mob...."

"He sounds Syrian or of a related nationality," Wilson broke in.

"....And as such he would have men working for him he could trust. Men of his own nationality."

"Right!" Wilson said emphatically.

"Guess we're here," Dain observed as the cab slid along the curb and stopped.

DAIN PAID and stepped to Wilson's side. The short, swarthy pulp writer was looking with an odd air of distaste at the grimy front of the store before them. Faded gilt letters proclaimed it to be *Hasjian's*. Whatever that meant. Dain moved to the window and peered through the dust crust.

"Antiques and things," he observed.

"Well. Let's try it," Wilson suggested.

The door opened into the gloom-filled interior. They waited for someone to come out of the rear, partitioned by beaded curtains. They had heard the tinkle of a bell in the distance, so knew they had been announced. And after a moment a figure came from behind the beads and advanced on them.

He was short, slender, with a narrow dark-featured face. Jet eyes searched their faces. His nose was large, thin and hooked, and a narrow line of hair lay along his upper lip. His mouth was a straight line which Dain would have sworn wore lipstick. The man spoke in a high thin voice, though one without foreign accent:

"Yes...? Your desires, sirs?"

Dain took the lead. "We have something we thought you might be interested in...."

The man's hands flew outward in a woman's gesture of dismay. His eyes rolled in their sockets, as he said:

"How sad that you have been misled. For twenty years Hasjian has been at this very address. But at last he has come to the time of retirement. I am so sorry, indeed."

Wilson, shadowed by the taller Fenton, suddenly stepped forward, his hand outstretched to show the title of the book in his hand. Hasjian's lids flickered as his eyes moved downward in a hasty glance. The smile still played about the thin lips but the jet eyes suddenly seemed alert, like an animal's.

"One grand, pal," Wilson said. "Just a grand. That's all. The last one. The dealer said you offered that much for it...."

"My dear friends," Hasjian said, his head moving back and forth and his mouth set in a feminine simper. "How truly sad that you have made your journey in vain. This dealer you spoke of made a mistake. A thousand dollars. Paugh! I am a collector, it is true. But a thousand dollars... Two hundred at the most... Yes, not more!"

Dain stepped aside so that the two, Wilson and Dain, stood shoulder to shoulder. Dain let Wilson continue; he seemed to be doing very well. He caught Wilson's next gesture, a slipping from his pocket of a hidden object. And Dain knew the purpose of that movement.

"...And for this, Mister Hasjian?" Wilson said, thrusting his open palm almost under the other's nose, showing the spear head in all its gleaming intricacies.

"For that, this!" Hasjian's face became transformed into a snarling woman's as he spat full in Wilson's face. "Get out! Get out!"

WILSON merely stood for a moment in stony silence. Then he took a kerchief from his pocket and

after wiping his face free of spittle dropped the kerchief to the floor as if he didn't want it to soil his clothes.

"Get out!" Hasjian shrieked again. "Out!"

"Okay, my friend, my greasy, fruity friend," Wilson said. "But first...." Hasjian flew backward to fall with a crash among the bric-a-brac, sending a large vase tumbling in a thousand fragments. Wilson hit like a prize fighter, hooking with the whole body driving from the hip.

"For the spitting?" Dain asked casually as they walked toward the door.

"No! He was like a woman. And a man doesn't hit a woman, no matter the provocation. There are other ways. No! That was the first payment in the death of my friend, Gordy...."

"That hung me up," Dain said as they strolled down State Street. "I don't get it. Why did he blow his top that way when he saw the spear head?"

"The answer is more simple than you imagine. We are always prone to make things more complex than they are. A natural way of thinking. I am of the theory man never seeks the direct route, but always the most circuitous. He saw it and knew immediately that Sateh-Hop had come back from the dead. And knew, also, that now he had more than a few live ones to fight. He had the reincarnated or resurrected souls of ancient Egypt to fight. Our friend Hasjian was most unhappy to see that golden spear head."

"That I've got to think over," Dain said, "before I can agree with you. Be it as you say. Now what? There are but two of us and I'm sure no matter how many who-dun-its you've written, they don't make a cop of you."

"True," Wilson said. "But they have taught me one thing. Get to

know and make friends of certain men in headquarters. Like the man I'm going to see now." He turned and suddenly opened one of a pair of double doors in the building they stopped before.

For the first time Dain felt a deep admiration for this stocky man with the perpetual growth of black stubble on his face. He had done the leading, knowing all the time where he was taking Dain, yet, like a fine actor never betraying the next line by over-acting.

The door was marked simply. Lieutenant James Hagg. Wilson knocked and at the deep-toned "Come in" entered, Dain hard at his heels.

A man was seated at a desk, a number of photos before him in jumbled array. The only arresting part of the rather ordinary face before them was the eyes. They were steel grey, piercing in their deliberately intent stare. He stood and came around the desk, the eyes no longer intent, but slitted in genuine warmth and joy at seeing Wilson.

"Jed Wilson! Where the hell have you been? And don't tell me pounding a typewriter, because you're the laziest character who ever lived."

They shook hands hard, grinning like a couple of cats, smiling with their whole beings at each other. Dain felt a warmth steal over him. This sign of friendship was but the outward manifestation of a deeper feeling. These two had respect for each other, and that was sometimes better than friendship.

"Nah," Wilson said after introducing Dain. "I'm retired. Sold a story to Argosy, for eight hundred bucks. Like a lord I'm living. Hah-hah! No yocks? So I can go back to being a straight man. Jim, you heard about Gordy's death I'm sure?"

Hagg nodded, sobered at the re-

membrance. He stared at Wilson.

"Well, I think we've got a lead," Wilson said.

HAGG PULLED several chairs up and demanded the particulars. He listened with an absorbed interest until Wilson had told to the last detail what had happened in the last two days. Then Hagg asked Fenton several questions, each needle-sharp in its probing. He stroked his nose with a long slender finger as he leaned far back in the swivel chair. Then he straightened and said:

"As far as Heyward's death is concerned, Conley's on it. My hands are tied. Gordy's death has not been given to my department yet. But it will be I'm sure. Now, Jed, you know what I do in the department. So I *can* cooperate on some things. Hasjian and his friends, for example. The name San, Fenton heard as they hit him. An odd name, Japanese, perhaps. At any rate I'll assign a couple of boys to tail you two. And if something breaks I'll let you know."

They rose as he gave each a handshake. At the door Wilson turned and said: "Oh. By the way, Jim. Find out if a man, a Syrian named Hasjian, was a dragoman in any expedition to the pyramids, twenty years ago."

"That's all you want of me?" Hagg asked. "Okay. Even how much he charged for his labor. See you fellas later. Bye...."

"What made you ask that?" Dain asked as they started down State Street toward the Loop.

"Guys like us run into all sorts of things when we do research on a story," Wilson said. "Did you ever use 'tea'? Marihuana? No? Well, the place smelled of it, yet not quite with the same sweetness. Then I remembered where I had smelled the same odor before. A friend of mine used

hashish, which is but the Asiatic relative of our Mexican and American variety. Hashish, however, is definitely a narcotic, and no matter the controversy on marihuana, no one denies the habit-forming virtues of hashish. It was that I smelled in Hasjian's place.

"Now this may sound screwy. But as I say I run into all sorts of odd facts when I do research and I store them in my little brain until I need them. Back some twenty years or so Scotland Yard came across something strange which they ran down. Hashish was being smuggled to England and no one seemed to know how. Until one day, in the unloading of a crate marked antiques, something fell out that was not so. A small packet containing a solid lump of the stuff, perhaps a pound of it.

"The Yard traced it down and discovered it was being smuggled in, unknowingly of course, by the expedition which was at that time excavating the site of one of the Pharoahs. A smart operator in Egypt had gotten wise that no one was inspecting the shipments and so had planted the stuff in the crates in Egypt and hired men to open them on arrival in England. Which leads me, for some reason, to suspect our friend Hasjian was in that deal...."

"And that, Sherlock," Dain said, "is my idea of the most illogical planting of suspicion I've ever heard."

Wilson laughed aloud. "I know," he said. "But I can't explain it in any other way."

"Well, what now?" Dain asked as they stopped on State and Madison alongside the window of a drug store.

Wilson looked at his watch and said, "Well, it's only three-thirty. Still time to take in a movie. There's a good one at the United Artists. How about you?"

"Nope. I think I can still see this guy at M. C. A. But how about dinner after the show?"

"Fine. London House?"

"Okay with me," Fenton said and waved as he started off toward the boulevard.

THE MOVIE wasn't quite up to Wilson's expectations or the publicity men's releases. But the newsreel compensated for it. There was a minute of something which made his eyes pop. It started innocently enough with the announcer's mentioning that a new religious order was creating a stir in a community in central Illinois. Then followed a series of shots showing the community and an on-the-scene reporting of the opening of the 'Temple of Ishtar'.

There were scenes of some of the worshippers, of some of the priests, and one of the spiritual leader, a quick scene, but one which made Wilson sit straight up. For there on the screen, dressed in a queer costume which resembled that of a high priest of ancient Egypt, was their friend Hasjian. There was no mistaking him, even to the quirk of the single lifted brow Wilson had noticed.

Wilson didn't wait to see more. He had to make a telephone call. Jim Hagg had to learn of this. There were booths in the men's lounge. As he started down the stairs a man ran past, and paused on the bottom step in indecision. Then, as Wilson continued, the man whirled and started up the stairs again, but so quickly, he bumped into Wilson.

"Sorry," he said as he grasped Wilson's arm. Then he was racing up to the top again.

Wilson felt a sharp jab of pain as the man grabbed his arm. But it passed on the instant and he forgot

the incident. He looked about, spotted the booths and hastened to one which was "empty." He fished out a nickel and inserted it into the slot, and dialed headquarters. But luck was against him. He left the message, however, with the phone Sergeant, telling him to make sure that Hagg got it. Then he opened the door and fell flat on his face.

Several people saw him fall. In a moment they had gathered about him and lifted him to a couch while one of them raced for an usher. The usher called someone of authority and after a moment they carried Wilson up the stairs. There were several people standing about, curious as to what was going on. At sight of Wilson's unconscious figure one of them stepped forward and cried:

"It's Jed. Jed Wilson. What happened?"

No one knew, of course. The man, a slim person in immaculate dark clothes, shook his head. "Look," he said to the assistant manager. "My name is George Hovian. I have a place on Lake Shore Drive. Here is my card. My chauffeur is waiting for me. Allow me to take my friend to a doctor."

The assistant manager looked at the card, figured quickly that perhaps it were better to let this Hovian take care of this Wilson chap, and agreed. He followed the ushers, who helped carry Wilson out to the curb, where, as Hovian said, a chauffeured car drew up. And in a moment Wilson was placed carefully within, the door closed and Hovian, one arm thrown about Wilson in a protective gesture, waved the driver to move on.... Had there been an interested observer, he would have wondered at the odd caress Hovian gave to the book lying at Wilson's side....

"DAMN!" DAIN FENTON muttered the imprecation softly, irritably. "Something's wrong. Wilson doesn't look like the kind of guy who doesn't keep dates." He caught the eye of a pretty girl at another table and wondered why she looked so oddly at him. And realized he had been talking aloud. He grinned at her and blew a kiss. She colored, but he saw she gave him a slant-eyed look as he called the waitress and asked for his check.

He walked to the lobby and paused there in indecision, biting his thumb nail, wondering what to do about this mysterious not-arrival. He had Wilson's home phone number. He decided to call on the spur of the moment.

No answer. Perhaps he had run across something and had contacted Hagg at police headquarters. He called there and was told that the Lieutenant had just left a second before. No, they couldn't say where or why. Suddenly Dain knew he had to get to the United Artists theatre. A cruising cab picked him up and delivered him there in a matter of a couple of minutes.

Dain knew it would be next to impossible to get anyone to remember who had gone in or out. But he tried. Neither cashier nor ticket taker nor usher he approached remembered. But the last usher he spoke to remembered the name Wilson, vaguely. He called the assistant manager. And Dain learned what had happened.

"But how could you let an unconscious man be taken from the theatre...?" he began in exasperation.

The assistant manager shrugged his shoulders. "Look, my friend. This Hovian person gave me his card, identified this Wilson by name. After all, we searched his pockets and found his wallet. He had identification which

said he was Jed Wilson, the name Hovian called him by. What did you expect of me?"

"I suppose you're right," Dain admitted. "Well, I might just as well get to police headquarters and wait for Hagg to show up."

But he didn't have to make that trip. Hagg showed up as Dain was starting out the lobby.

In a few moments Hagg had the whole story. He punched a fist and berated himself. "Of all the times I had to be called out. I knew I should have let one of the Sergeants handle it. But no! They wanted me on the scene." He whirled on the manager, who by this time had come to the realization that something was decidedly wrong and that he had better help as much as he could. "Look, mister. When does your newsreel go on?"

THE ASSISTANT looked at his wrist watch. "You're lucky. In about ten seconds...."

Hagg took Dain's arm and marched into the theatre, saying in a low voice as he did, "We'll see the reason for Jed's hurried phone call, anyway."

"It was Hasjian all right," Dain said as they came out of the darkened interior. "I'll swear on it. But what gets me is why did they grab Jed? Why didn't they follow me?"

"Because he had two things they wanted, the spear head and the book," Hagg observed shrewdly.

He was right, as Wilson was to learn. But that was later. Much later. Dawn was breaking as the car slowed before crossing the tracks which were the north boundary to Eastbrook. The jolting of the car across the series of tracks woke Wilson. He shook himself and opened eyes which seemed to have been shut up with glue. Consciousness and, with it, realization

dawned and Wilson sat up sharply.

"Hey!" he turned to the figure beside him. "Who the hell are you and how did I get here?" he asked.

"The important question, my friend," said the man who called himself Hovian, "is where are you going?"

"So you asked it for me. Now answer it."

"To the Temple of Ishtar, my friend," came the startling answer. "You saw it in the newsreel?..." There was hidden laughter in his voice.

But Jed Wilson wasn't looking at his tormentor. His eyes were wide and staring at something past the driver's shoulder and, after a second Hovian turned to see what made Wilson stare so. The driver must have seen it also because the car ground to a swerving stop. They had been travelling a winding road which led between high hedges and deep forest growth. There was an amorphous something coming toward them. It appeared to be circular and shimmered in the sun. But Wilson had recognized it immediately.

"The High Priest," Hovian said in a voice that was a whine of fear.

Then it was before them, huge, a ball which emanated power from its greenish phosphorescence. The figure of the priest was plainly to be seen within. And his voice came sharply to their ears:

"I have come to summon you before the Pharaoh, Sateh-Hop. He is displeased at what has happened...."

There was a sharp *puff* of sound and, later, no sound at all. Not a sound or whisper of one, nor was the strange sphere to be seen either. Wilson could feel the sensation of being lifted and being borne, as on invisible wings, yet he could no more move an arm or even a finger to stay himself from being carried off, than if that

limb had really been securely tied.

He was looking straight ahead. The curving road, the hedges, the forest growth were no longer there. Cloud formations flowed about them. Thicker and darker those clouds became, formed heavier masses until nothing was to be seen except a dark, shapeless, constantly moving mass.

There was absolute transition, immediate and unbelievable: There had been the cloud mass one instant, the next they were in ancient Egypt, at the court of a Pharaoh.

"Come," bade a voice. "Come. Sateh-Hop desires to speak with you."

WILOSON turned his head, not feeling surprise that he had established contact with his muscles again. There, standing to one side a few feet removed from them, was the man from the sphere. He was wearing the robe which by now was familiar to Wilson and his face still bore the same distant serene look. His outstretched arm pointed out the figure of the man seated on the throne on a raised dais at the far end of the long, columned room.

The robed attendants, the warriors standing in small groups, the musicians, the women lolling on cushions or being attended by eunuchs, the priests close to the throne, none of these seemed to be even curious about the two men who walked by the side of the priest. Only the man on the throne, the fingers of one hand caressing a short square beard, never left off watching their approach.

Then Wilson was close enough to see the Pharaoh and apprise the outward appearance to better value. A strong, hooked nose; eyes wide-set and deep, probing intense eyes; a cruel yet somehow just mouth, if one could reconcile this feeling; the figure strong, though it was hard to say

definitely; and last, the sign of a King, a feeling of inherited power.

"So these be the moderns?" Sateh-Hop asked. "The slender one has a sly manner; I like it not. The other stares me straight in the eyes, yet more in curiosity and wonder than in fear. I like him."

"It is he who has the golden spear point," the high priest said.

"The one we are seeking?" the Pharaoh asked.

"I know not. He has the book, also."

"Then let us see if the spear point unlocks the secret of the book," Sateh-Hop said.

The high priest held his hand out, palm up. And without a word or look of refusal Wilson placed the book and spear point within. The priest opened the book to the passage about what was foretold about the last of the Pharaohs and laid the spear point on a diagonal across the page. Wilson looked up in time to see the cloud of disappointment in the priest's eyes.

"So another book and another point and another failure," said the Pharaoh.

Wilson turned for some odd reason toward Hovian, who had been peering over his shoulder. He caught the look of sly triumph in the man's eyes. And guessed the reason for it instantly. As well as many things which had not been clear before, such as Hassjian's anger at Dain and himself.

"No. It isn't the one you seek, mighty King," Wilson said in a loud voice. "But I know where it can be found. I know the one who has the key and the lock. This man's master, the one who calls himself the High Priest of the Temple of Ishtar."

"There is one who profanes the name of our Goddess?" Pharaoh asked in anger.

"Not only profanes but is planning to use the secrets of the *pyramid-in-*

reverse to his own gain, and the destruction of the world."

"If he has the key and the lock and has opened the book to the message within we are powerless," said the High Priest in horror.

Sateh-Hop nodded in somber silence, though his face was dark with anger.

"How do you mean?" Wilson asked.

THE MESSAGE is plain writ, that one but has to build the Temple again as it once was and at the conjunction of the three planes of time he will find the secret of the hereafter, the voice of eternity, and the power to create the machines of destruction...."

Wilson looked at the High Priest in wonder. The words were gibberish, yet he remembered something in the passage about machines which flew in space, weapons of war—there had been mention in other books of the strange and terrible weapons the ancient possessed—and ways of putting them to use. In the hands of men like Hasjian it was possible that a whole world could tumble.

"Why can't you bring this interloper to justice, as you have brought me here?" Wilson asked.

"Because if he has the power it is greater than ours," said the High Priest.

"Greater than the power of reincarnation. For isn't it evident you can and have made reincarnation possible?" Wilson asked.

"But we cannot force him to disgorge the key and the lock. We are the not-yet-alive, though we can bring the alive to us. The soothsayer's prophecy is not yet complete. For it was also foretold that there would be many books writ of what he prophesied, but that only the one who had the key and the golden spear point of Sateh-Hop could unlock it. We have

searched for a thousand years for the key and lock and now have found another has it."

"Then only the *alive* can get it away from Hasjian?" Wilson asked.

"Yes," said the High Priest.

"Then give me permission to try my hand?" Wilson turned to Sateh-Hop and asked his question of him.

The Pharaoh shook his head in a signal to the high priest. The dark eyes of the latter probed deep into Wilson's own and, as in a dream, the Pharaoh's court faded from view....

WILOSON opened his eyes to find himself on a bus. A hawker was closing his spiel: "....And there it is, folks, the Temple of Ishtar, the only authentic example of Egyptian architecture in the United States."

Wilson looked out of the window in the direction to which the spieler had pointed and saw it. It looked very much as he had seen it in the newsreel, but larger, with a *real* beauty.

He looked about him and realized he was on a sight-seeing bus. There were some twenty-five or thirty others on it. The bus rolled up the curving drive and the spieler got out and waved for his passengers to follow. Wilson joined the others in the tour. He wondered in idle thought how the High Priest was going to manage getting him back to the court once again, after he had achieved his objective. Later, he thought of how he was going to manage getting hold of the book and the spear point. Then they were on the threshold of the Temple.

He took in the wondrous architecture, the sculptured figures, the frieze along the walls, all the marvelous details with but a part of his mind. He listened for a clue from the barkers' spiel.

"....The ceremonies are at nine, noon, and four in the afternoon. We

will watch the four o'clock prayer...”

The group from the sight-seeing bus were but a small part of the crowd which had gathered to the religious ceremony. There were fully five thousand people gathered in the immense central court of the Temple. At the far end was a raised platform, semi-circular in shape. It had been made in such a manner that the sun would strike the platform at all hours of the ceremony, through an opening in the roof.

There had been the many sibilant sounds which seem to be part of the beginning of any religious event. These were silenced by the crashing sounds of many cymbals. And after, three notes from a half dozen horns.

Silence....

And four men stepped out from the wings, two and two, each garbed in a snow-white robe which fell from throat to ankle. A diadem of gold encircled their foreheads and as they stepped to the center altar, they sang a song in a foreign tongue. After the four had assembled before the altar there came on the scene two more who waited at the center of the stage for an instant.... A single crashing cymbal announced the coming of the High Priest of the Temple. He joined the two at the center and the three then marched forward to join the others at the altar. Wilson had recognized Hasjian, the antique dealer, as being the High Priest.

The rest followed as in a dream. There were chanted phrases from the men at the altar, phrases which were echoed by many of the worshippers; others appeared on the stage, men and women both, but all seen with but half an eye. Wilson had a mind only on finding a place of concealment.

There were many such places, but all seemed but for the moment. Then

he spotted the ideal place. Close at hand was a sort of recess. Darkness lay beyond and that darkness could mean but one thing, a passage into the unknown interior. Like a shadow, Wilson slipped away from the group and lost himself in the darkness of the passageway.

IT LED STRAIGHT back and at a downward slant. Now and then bisecting corridors met the one he was on but he followed the path he had chosen. The slope was gentle and the way long and he wondered how far he had to go. The Temple did not seem to be that long in its diameter, and since it was built in a circular shape there had to be an end to it sometime.

It ended. On a blank wall. Wilson stopped short, looked at the wall and wondered what sort of foolery this was. What good did a corridor do ending as this one did? There had to be something beyond. A sound as of pounding, a sort of thumping noise came to him. He stopped breathing to listen more closely. Then he released his breath in a long sigh. The strange sound came from beyond the wall. Then the wall was paper-thin, he reasoned.

The wall was as wide as the corridor, perhaps ten feet at the most. He moved along it, tapping with knuckles at the stone. Nothing. Once more he began his tapping. And this time he found the spot where the wall was hollow. But how to get beyond it? There had to be a place which forced the wall to pivot, for Wilson knew there had to be a pivot there.

He looked up and down the blank stone face and saw that it had been laid out with sections of smooth-faced stone, some fifteen inches in length and perhaps ten in width. These sections had been cemented together.

Then the secret lay in the line of cement, he continued to reason. He was right....

A whole section of the wall swung on a pivot as his fingers hooked in the cement. He had found the spot: a narrow opening permitted a finger to be inserted and a hook lay there to be pulled. A mellow light stole up from below. A flight of stairs faced him. He could not see the bottom of the long flight but he could hear the sounds of men at work.

He removed his shoes and stole down the stairs, after shoving the wall back to its original position. He knew, in effect, that he had closed the door of doom on himself, but he had to take that chance. If someone found the open door an alarm would be sounded. He had to take the chance of getting what he wanted, and the risk of getting back to safety....

THE STEPS were not only long, but curving and deep. He did not know how many he took or how far down he went. He became soaked with perspiration and, as he came closer and closer to the pounding and hammering, also filled with a tense expectancy. But when he finally arrived at floor level it was to a disappointment. He was at the very base of the temple. The floor was smooth, made of concrete, and stretched bare and empty as far as he could see.

But the sounds of work were very close now.

There were many things Wilson had an awareness of. The words of Sateh-Hop's High Priest came to him in fragments: "....Where the three planes cross....". He knew that somewhere below these slabs of concrete a work was going on which could have terrible consequences for the whole world.

He had but the one recourse of at-

tempting, by the slow and weary labor of walking step by step across the entire floor area, to find where the planes intersected. Somewhere on this floor was a slab of concrete, like the pivot above, which opened to what he was seeking.

Logic told him that the sounds he had been listening to would be loudest under that slab. So step by step, foot by foot, he travelled back and forth crossing from one wall to another, taking how many paces he did not know, until at the end he arrived at the place he was seeking.

But now he was faced with taking the biggest risk of all. He had an idea how the pivot worked, but he was blind to what it opened on. For a long while he stood figuring out his chances of survival. And in the end he took the bull by the horns. His fingers felt along the edge of the concrete until he found the same sort of slit and the hook beyond. Steeling himself, Wilson pulled strongly at the hook and the slab pivoted away from the floor.

Strong light flowed up from below. It was constant, which meant there was a generator down there unless they had strung wiring into the concrete itself. Oddly enough, now that there was an opening for sound to flow through Wilson discovered that it was no longer so loud. For the barest second he hesitated, then, nerving himself, he took the plunge.

The stairs were only ten in number. And they led to a narrow balcony overlooking a vast scene of immense activity. Wilson did not realize how tense and even close to hysteria he was until he stepped out on the narrow balcony and found he was alone on it. It was the laugh which insisted upon gurgling up in his throat which apprised him of his emotional state. Then reason came to his rescue and

he slumped to the floor. Though no one was up there with him he knew that someone might look up and see him standing there, and as he fell he swung the slab closed on its pivot.

The die had been cast!

Wilson peered over the edge and watched for a long time. He was astounded at the number of men working. There must have been several hundred of them. There was something strange about these men. They wore an odd sort of garment, which was rather an apron placed over the middle, than anything else. Above the waist they were bare. All of them were dark skinned, with black hair, and most of them wore short square-cut beards. It was the style of the beards which gave Wilson the sensation he had seen these men before. It wasn't until he saw a number of guards walking among them, guards with whips strung over their arms, that Wilson found the clue. There had been such a scene in a book on Egypt he had once read. The scene had been a group of slaves, at work on the Pyramids, and strolling among them were overseers or guards with whips about their forearms.

THEN WILSON'S prying eyes looked further and the ancient scene held a modern connotation. Stationed on various platforms in strategic spots were a number of men, these in modern dress, and all carrying sub-machine guns of various types. And the slaves were working with modern tools.

Try as he might Wilson could not see how he was going to do anything about forestalling Hasjian's purpose, whatever it was. He continued to look about and after a bit saw that there was a sort of central watch tower from which, like spokes in a wheel, other towers radiated.

It was on the center tower that Wilson saw a familiar face. One which he had seen before, at least. He puzzled his brain for a spell. It came to him in a flash. The one who had been called San, the night he had met Dain Fenton. San had been one of the two men who had assaulted Fenton. And with the thought of Fenton, came another thought. Had Jim Hagg received his message...?

Then it was Wilson kicked himself mentally. Why all this adventuring in quest of death? He had promised something simply to escape. Well, with Hagg's aid he could still keep his promise. And more, get to the bottom of this weird mystery. All he had to do was get back to Eastbrook. He wormed his way back to the stair and started to crawl up. One step, two, three....

The three shots chipped slivers of concrete before his very nose. Like an animal Wilson pawed his way forward to the slab above. But two more shots from below made him pause there. Perhaps it was the warning voice which followed, which made him pause? "Hold it, Jack!" the voice commanded.

Wilson stood up, his hands held high over his head, turned and stepped down. Still with hands held high, he waited at the voice's command, until three men ran up the stairway at the far end of the platform. Each of these men was armed with sawed-off shotguns. They stationed themselves at three sides so that they had instant command over him should he attempt a foolish move. It was the last thing on his mind....

San looked Wilson over, a worried frown on his brow. It was obvious he was puzzled by the pulp writer's appearance. But on asking how he got there Wilson told he had gotten lost in the temple and had found the first

pivot door open. San stopped him sharply. San was unarmed, at least to the superficial glance. He sent a sharp blow to the side of Wilson's jaw, staggering the man.

"Don't give me that, punk!" he said. "Your story was okay till you bollixed it up. When those pivot doors open we get a warning. Just in case guys like you get nosey. You was spotted the minute you poked your head in.... Now start talking straight or I go to work on you."

WILOSON rubbed his aching jaw reflectively. There were several answers he could give, including the right one, but in this case they would all be wrong. This San, from the looks of his greasy face and his slender, high-strung figure and slightly mad eyes, was just waiting for an excuse to give Wilson a dose of the works.

"Okay! So I'll talk straight," Wilson said rapidly. "I got a hundred men planted around the temple. And it won't do Hasjian any good. It'll be too late for that...."

The mention of Hasjian's name was enough to startle San.

"Hold this punk here," he said to one of the men with the shotguns. "The boss gotta hear about this."

Wilson watched the other depart and grinned derisively after him. Within himself he felt the cold bands of fear contract around his heart. He didn't stand a chance at all. It was just a matter of time.

They had not long to wait. Hasjian was still wearing the robes of the High Priest. He swept in, followed by San and a couple of other men. Wilson could see their approach from the distant side of the balcony. It was evident that Hasjian's visit to this lower region was enough to make the slaves stop their labor and Wilson caught another significant fact. The armed

guards doubled their watch. Hasjian was not too well-liked. Wilson lowered his gaze and saw that for a moment the guard watching him was intent on the approaching party.

He acted with all the speed at his command. He whirled swiftly and shot his elbow to the guard's belly. It caught him slack-jawed and knocked the breath from him. And as the guard doubled up Wilson kicked up with his knee to the side of the man's face. He was knocked off the platform.

"Free yourselves, slaves!" Wilson shouted as he leaped from the platform and ran toward the center of the suddenly tense crowd. He didn't know whether they understood English or not, but guessed that they did.

He dove head first for one of the guards with the whips and knocked him to the ground. It was the signal for a wild melee. The aproned, bearded figures swarmed over the men with the whips. And while some did that others rushed the platform guards.

Hasjian stopped at the sound and sight of the wild fight below. He understood immediately what the prisoner had in mind. There was but one thing to do. "To the balcony!" he shouted in his high, thin voice. "To the balcony!"

BUT WILSON'S call to freedom had unleashed the something which had been brewing for a long time. These half-nude men had tasted the whip and the savagery of their masters. It had never been to their liking. They had needed only the spark. Jed Wilson had provided it.

They followed the short husky figure with an instinct born to men who needed leaders. And Wilson was as one imbued with a strength and daring he had never dreamed he possessed. He had recognized the need for taking

the central platform. It commanded the whole of the huge floor, and from it they could spray the balcony with some degree of success. But even more, they could prevent the escape of Hasjian and those with him. It was the keystone of the plan which had formed in his mind the instant he had gone into action.

The armed guards had immediately followed their leader's command. But now the whole floor was a seething maelstrom of fighting men. And the center, the very hub of it all, was Jed Wilson and those who had swiftly rushed to his aid.

Hasjian, too, had seen the value of the center platform. And had amended his first command by yelping to those guards on the platform to hold it at all costs. His words had been the signal for the shooting to begin.

It was indiscriminate and horrible.

Men were mowed down as the grass cutter cuts the grass. The sub-machine guns recognized neither friend nor foe. Men all about Wilson fell or stumbled, screaming or in the quick silence of immediate death, but it was as though he bore a charmed life. The leaden pellets plucked at his shirt, whispered their message in his hair, tried to trip him by ripping his trousers. Not a single one, however, found the flesh.

And so imbued with determination were the slaves that not even death could stop their wild charge. Freedom was to be won at all costs. A dozen of them, with Wilson in the lead, reached the center platform simultaneously. Five men stood on it, facing in various directions.

The guns of those guards were held low. The guards moved in a slow pivot from right to left, their fingers at a constant press on the triggers, spraying their death stream. But the

game was not completely one-sided. Early, some of the slaves had taken one of the towers and with it the guns of the guards. And afterward two other towers were taken. The firing had become wild and indirect, but that fact alone kept the center tower's guards from making a rout of it. And that fact alone made possible Wilson and those with him being able to rush it.

Men dropped at Wilson's side. Their blood spattered him from head to toe, made a slippery mess of the floor. But at the last a half dozen found sanctuary below the tower.

Wilson's breath came in great gasps. He looked like a wild man. His eyes were alight with a ferocious gleam, as if he had suddenly gone mad. He looked up while the six stayed in a close group about him. The chattering of the sub-machine guns was like a mad riveting. And the screams of the wounded and dying were a muted harmony to the gun's clatter.

"They'll pick us off one by one," Wilson growled, "if we try to climb to the tower from below. Those guards have to be kept busy."

THE BLOODY-FIGURED men with him, bearded, passionate-faced with unrestrained anger, shook their heads in agreement. Wilson peered this way and that, searching for the means to make his plan a success. Then his eyes passed over the balcony and he knew how it could be done.

"Call to the men with the guns to get to the balcony and engage the guards on this tower," he said.

As if his mind had figured out the measure of his plan, he realized, an instant later, that Hasjian and those with him would escape. But they would be taken care of later.... First to clear the tower and get the guns.

Three of the six died in the taking of the tower after the balcony was occupied. And as before, it seemed Wilson led a charmed life. Desperate as their try, even hopeless, they succeeded in it. There were two ladders leading upward. Wilson and three others ran swiftly up one while the other three used the other. It wasn't a matter of choice, simply one of chance. But two of the guards of the three who were left were standing facing the ladder's opening. And as the three came up so were they mowed down, one at a time.

On the other hand the single guard was standing just in advance of the second ladder and so did not see or hear the four men who climbed up. Wilson was in the lead. He took in the situation at a glance and dove swiftly at the guard.

The surprise was complete. Further, so great was the noise of firing, the other two did not even know what was going on behind them until Wilson began shooting. He had wrested the gun from the fellow's hand and whirled him backward for his friends to take care of. Shooting a sub-machine gun was not new to him. He had used one on the Italian front in the war. The two on the tower died quickly, one almost cut in half by the stream of bullets.

It was the end of the battle. Those on the balcony, seeing that the central tower had been taken stopped their shooting and silence fell on the battlefield, a silence broken only by the sound of those who had been wounded.

PERHAPS a hundred of the several who had been slaves, were left alive. And a quarter of those were wounded. The sub-machine guns had taken a terrible toll. The bloody survivors gathered about Jed Wilson after

he descended the tower and looked to him for future guidance.

He knew they understood English. First he asked about what could be done for the wounded. Nothing! Everything for their welfare came from above. And, as one of the slaves, a giant of a man, said, "The control is also above should anything go wrong down here. I was one of those who helped construct it."

"What are we to do with them?" Wilson asked.

A pregnant silence answered him. He translated it correctly and went pale. It was a horrible thing, yet he knew that nothing could be done about it. One of the black-bearded men looked straight into his eyes and made a motion with hand across throat but Wilson shook his head. The giant had also seen his comrade's motion.

"It would be more merciful...." he said.

"No!" Wilson said sharply. He had given the lead. And he felt he had to keep it. "Not while we have a chance to get out of here. We'll do our best to ease their pain.... Now! I want to know how you got down here and what Hasjian expects to find."

They looked to one another, blankly at first, then with a dawning realization that Wilson did not know what they had been doing. Several tried to answer at once, but stopped as the giant took command. It was evident that he had been their leader, or one of them, from the manner in which he commanded instant obedience.

"....It's obvious that you know something of what is going on. Otherwise you would not be here. The door which pivots is well concealed and could only have been found by one who sought it out.

"How much do you know?"

"A great deal," Wilson replied. "Yet not enough. I know that somewhere below is the secret of the *pyramid-in-reverse*. In the book I read it was said that the weapons of the future lay concealed within. But I know very little else...." He had been about to say that Sateh-Hop himself had allowed him to seek out the mystery but forebore. He did not know how these men felt about the Pharaoh. "I have guessed many things. It was a legend with some of the Indians of this country that in the long ago there came many people in chariots of flame descending from the sky and that they built a strange house where they landed. Then it wasn't a legend but the truth."

"Yes," said the giant, simply. "The book you read...did it say what happened to the last of the great Pharaohs?"

"I don't know," Wilson answered truthfully. "I found only what I thought was relevant to our search and read no further."

"You should have. The soothsayers said that the last of the great Pharaohs, Sateh-Hop, would die before his thirtieth year and so would not be able to conquer the world as was first said. But that there would pass a certain number of centuries, at the end of which he would be reincarnated and all his court, in their same bodies, but that they would not be *the alive*. That they would only become *the alive* when the slaves had constructed the room of the weapons in the *pyramid-in-reverse*. And that these slaves would be *the alive*.

"Thus it came to pass. The prophecy was fulfilled and the sleep of centuries was over. But we woke only to find ourselves the slaves of a worse master."

WILSON felt feverish. Had he not heard this himself, he would not have believed it. That these men had never been dead but asleep as was their Pharaoh; that there were weapons with which the world could be conquered was as difficult to believe as the story of Sinbad, as a truth.

Yet there he was, face-to-face with them. And there was not the smallest shred of doubt but there were such weapons.

The huge slave had been staring at Jed Wilson with intent eyes. He nodded to himself as if satisfied with what he saw in the other's face. "Now we are free," he said. "And not in the power of this Hasjian. For the present, anyway...."

Wilson snapped to new life at the words. The man was right. Not for the present. But how long would it be before that condition was changed?" Hasjian was not going to sit back and let them do what they wanted. Whatever it was in his mind to do he would not let be undone by a handful of these 'other world' people and Wilson.

"How far had the work progressed?" Wilson asked.

The giant smiled. "As far as we wished it to," he said.

Elation made Wilson's voice go higher: "Then it can be finished immediately?"

"If you desire.... But remember! The instant we are done, the *not alive* become *the alive*."

And that took thought. If Sateh-Hop's ordained mission was the conquering of the world, then what matter who held the key? It could only open to destruction. Now Wilson was stymied. He had set out in the beginning to catch Gordie's murderer and had become involved in an amazing adventure. Dain Fenton, too, had set out to catch a murderer, although that

was not as large an issue with Fenton as it was with Wilson. Now greater and more important things had to be reckoned with.

Perhaps the fate of the world rested in his hands, lay in his decision?

For a long moment he stood, head bowed, shoulders slumped, his whole being intent on deep concentration. Now either this giant slave was right or the High Priest of the Pharaoh was right. One had said that since he did not possess the key Sateh-Hop could do nothing to fulfill the prophecy; the giant said otherwise. While somewhere above, Hasjian was plotting to circumvent both Wilson and the Pharaoh.

There was but one solution. The weapons must be found and destroyed....

The giant stood mute before him at Wilson's decision. His followers, sensing the importance of what was being said, moved close. At last the deep-set eyes of the bearded face bent their strong gaze into Wilson's and the large head shook slowly up and down.

"We were brought back for a purpose. Who can question the God's intent or reason? Ishtar was ever the greatest of our Goddessess. But Ra gave us life. and who knows but that Ra does not wish for us to return....? I will follow your will to the end and if then the prophecy is fulfilled, then I have done my part. Come, let us to our task."

THE EQUIPMENT Hasjian had provided was modern to the last degree. Once more the air hammers began their wild chattering, the sledges their pounding at the virgin rock, smooth as marble, looking as if it had been laid out with foresight. But now there was a difference in the work. Their was purpose and a definite pattern. The slaves were working close,

yet Wilson, standing in the central tower, could see the pattern. 'Where the three planes intersect', had been the words used. Now he could see what those words meant. The floor, one wall and the time... Those were the planes, time, space and size... Wilson found he was tense, breathless, on edge. How long would Hasjian give them? How could they escape? What must be done with what was unearthed?

Two of the answers came almost on the heels of each other. There was a wild sound of triumphant voices, as a whole section of wall tumbled inward to reveal a wide stairway; and almost at the same instant, all the lights went out as did the power for the machinery. But Hasjian had been that moment too late. He should have thought of the power sooner.

It was pitch dark near the central tower but where the wall had tumbled inward a weird radiation of light showed, as a sort of nimbus for the deeper, stronger light below....

Wilson ran forward with stumbling steps to stand at the head of the group at the top of the stairs. The odd light showed the faces of the men, fright, awe, amazement, all written plainly to be read. Even the giant seemed awed by what they had unearthed. Only Wilson, the ever-practical Wilson, seemed unimpressed.

"Let's go!" he said. And suited his steps to his words.

For the first ten steps his were the only ones. Then he heard the sound of a single pair of feet in hesitant movement after him, and in a second or two, many others. He went faster, and as if his utter unconcern shamed the rest, he could hear them come more and more swiftly after him.

The stair ended on the lip of what appeared to be a vast chasm. The

strange light flowed up from some source below. The opposite lip of the chasm was lost in the distance, so vast was it. But Wilson's eyes and those of the others saw only what lay revealed below.

It was a scene impossible to describe. A vast city, a plain, temples, a whole country lay revealed, covered in a sort of veil, a mist of light.... It lay serene and dead below them. Then, as if by magic, or as though the time had come for revelation, the mist lifted and many things were shown more clearly.

THEY SAW emplacements for what Wilson surmised were for rockets, but of such a size as to make those of the Earth's nations toys. Covering one whole angle of the plane were row on row until the last of them were lost in the distance, of strange-looking craft, without wings, like huge tears of metal: space ships.

The faint sibilance of someone's released breath made Wilson turn for some reason. And once again he felt that odd prickling of the scalp, that cold wind of terror strike his breath. The phosphorescent sphere...it was there in the room above. He saw its evanescence radiate and make light the room they had just quitted. Now it was floating down the wide staircase. And behind it many more, smaller ones, hundreds of them....

The giant, standing at Wilson's shoulder, turned at the same instant. His eyes went wide, then closed in resignation. While from his lips, as if in prayer, came the words: "From the dead were we brought, to bring life to the dead. Mighty Ishtar and all the lesser ones, we await the future with thee...."

Wilson pressed as close to the wall as he could. The balls of flame, in whose interior stood a being, rolled

down the stairs and to the lip of the chasm. And as they came they touched one or more of the slaves. Tiny puffs of smoke marked that contact, and where there had been a living, breathing human, there was nothing.

A strange thing happened then. The largest ball, which held Sateh-Hop and his High Priest, paused at the lip, then turned to where Wilson was pressed close against the wall. It rolled up to a foot or so of him and from its flaming greenish depths there came words:

"Your word was kept. The door to the future was unlocked. So let the will of the Gods be done... To eternity!"

And saying these words, the sphere wheeled away from Wilson and followed the others, who had disappeared over the edge of the abyss. Wilson rushed to the edge, peered over and saw them floating downward. The prophecy needed but a little more and it would be fulfilled.

WILSON wheeled and dashed back up the stairs. He came to the head of the stairs, paused and realized something was wrong before he knew what it was. Then he saw what it was which made him pause. The lights were on in the room....

"All right! Get him!" a voice commanded.

Wilson whirled in the direction of the voice, and threw his hands above his head. A dozen figures leaped on him and bore him to the ground. Fists pummeled him, beat at his face and body until his senses seemed no longer his. Then he felt the presence of someone above him. And a high thin voice, a voice filled with hysteria, screamed:

"Where are they? Where are the slaves?"

Wilson opened his mouth but only

to allow a bloody seepage of spittle to flow more freely. His eyes glared their hate at Hasjian, whose maniacal face was bent above him.

"Find them, wise guy," Wilson said.

He saw the foot rushing toward him, tried to turn his head, but succeeded only in getting it in the cheek. Pain rushing in sickening waves made him feel ill.

"Tell me or I'll kick you to death!" Hasjian screamed.

There was strength only for the slow shaking of Wilson's head. Once more he felt the blow of the shod foot. And this time he had not even the strength to turn his head. It took him high on the forehead and skidded off, tearing the skin in a wide bloody gash.

There was the sound of a voice screaming, "I'll kick you to death!" It kept saying the same thing over and over again. But Wilson didn't care. At least not too much. But it was so irritating to hear that womanish voice. Besides, Hasjian stank of some perfume which offended. Wilson wished the idiot would go away....

"Jed! Jed! Come on, man...."

Now that was strange, Wilson thought. That was Jim Hagg's voice. What the hell was he doing there? Something was wrong, and he'd better try to straighten it out. Better warn Jim. This Hasjian was nobody's monkey....

He opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was the face of Jim Hagg, eyes narrowed in concern, peering into his own. Close to the detective's shoulder was Dain Fenton. Wilson turned his head and saw state troopers, plainclothesmen and the blue-clad police of Eastbrook. Here and there groups of the police and troopers guarded Hasjian's henchmen, under armed guard. But of Hasjian nothing was to be seen.

Hagg and Fenton gave Wilson a helping hand. Blood still flowed from the cuts of Hasjian's fists and kicks. But the stocky man disregarded that. "Hey!" he said. "We can't waste time. Hasjian knows he's licked; Sateh-Hop and his people are down in the chasm...."

Hagg and Fenton looked to one another. The same thought was in their minds. Had Wilson taken too much punishment? But whether he had or not he was determined on the course he wanted to follow.

"Let's get out of here! But fast."

"Now take it easy, Jed," Hagg cautioned. "Hasjian can't get away. There were ten guys on his heels...."

"To hell with Hasjian!" Wilson shouted. "It's us. This place is wired for sound...."

HAGG AND Fenton looked at one another again. And this time there were no questions to ask. Wilson was right or wrong, but this was no time for finding out, or rather it wasn't the place for it.

As one they turned, Hagg issuing quick instructions for evacuation, and he and Fenton helping Wilson toward the closest pivot door at the same time. The way back to the temple seemed interminable to Wilson. And when they reached the open once more he well understood why some people wanted to kiss the ground on finding safety. But first to remove oneself completely from the vicinity.

They were a hundred yards off when the explosion came. It knocked most of them off their feet. They turned to see what had happened to the Temple of Ishtar. A vast pall of greyish smoke was settling over the area. And where once had stood the immaculate temple to the Egyptian goddess, nothing remained but this clump

of smoke. Not even a single stone remained. There was nothing at all.

But the strangest part of it was when they returned to look. They were just in time to see the earth, as if it were water, fill in the greater part of an immense hole, a thousand feet across, until it was almost level.

So the prophecy was not fulfilled because a human being in the twentieth century had found the key and had tried to use it to his own purpose, dark as it was. Nor had Hasjian gained anything. For he too, it turned out, had gone to rest with Sateh-Hop. He had never left the temple....

As Hagg put it:

"The mystery of why Gordie and that rat friend of yours were killed will remain that. We can 'only sur-

mise. Heywood probably found something out which marked him for death. How they killed the man who did the killing, well, that's something I can't figure, unless it was post-hypnosis. The first case of its kind, I believe."

"Gordie was interested in esoterica. He read the book and got to thinking of it. And when Hasjian or one of his friends tried to get it from him he resisted and was killed. That's the only thing I can figure."

But, thought Wilson, what can you figure about the chasm I saw. Would the prophecy still be fulfilled sometime in the future? Would the *not alive* become *the alive* some day again...?

THE END

Junkyard

of the Solar System

By SAM DEWEY

OUTSIDE THE orbit of Mars and within the orbit of Jupiter are thousands of good-sized chunks of matter and millions of lesser pieces called asteroids. Often the larger planetoids are dignified by the name "minor planets", but the term is somewhat of an exaggeration, since the largest of them is no more than five hundred miles in diameter—a midget as astronomical dimensions go. The churning melee of dust and planetoids called the asteroid belt should really be regarded as a cosmic junkyard in which the debris of the Solar System has collected.

Numerous observatories have made a definite program, however, of computing the orbits of the larger of these asteroids, such as Eros, Hidalgo and Ceres, for their paths serve as a check point for analysis of the orbit of the Moon—and this enables astronomers to make an exact check on their predicted orbits.

The origin of the planetoids is still

believed to lie in the explosion of disintegration of some small planet between Mars and Jupiter. The cause of the disintegration was undoubtedly the unbalanced gravitational stresses of a false orbit. Whatever the case, the asteroid belt is a startling and major phenomenon of the System. In terms of eventual astrogation and rocketry, the asteroid belt will be important, mainly because it should provide rich mining opportunities. After all, nowhere else and by no means can the interior of a planet be reached. And in the asteroids you have one conveniently shattered into manageable little bits! The chances are that there are plenty of metals, elements, and possibly even uranium derivatives, floating about in the Belt. It has also been suggested that, when space astrogation is widely developed, the asteroids may serve as beacons and guide stations for interplanetary traffic. Even the junkyard of the Solar System has its uses....



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

IN SCIENCE and science-fiction there are facets that appeal to the individual. We have our time-travel stories. The basic postulate of a time-travel story is that future and past exist in the same way as the present.

A tree, for example, is then a four-dimensional object whose three-dimensional cross sections are a seed, a sapling, a small tree, an ever larger tree, finally a fallen tree, a decaying tree, etc. And just as the light that comes into being when you strike a match radiates into space at a constant speed, covering so much distance in so many seconds, so also the thing we call the present travels in the fourth dimension, touching the successive three-dimensional cross sections of eternal reality, illuminating them for our conscious awareness.

The human brain then becomes a sort of four-dimensional wire along which the wave of awareness travels at a constant rate, and the movement of things is then an illusion rising from this travel of the wave front, awareness.

Everything exists, in our past and present and future. We aren't aware of it except in the three-dimensional wave front along which we continue to be aware.

Some startling conclusions can be gained from this approach. One, I may be one wave-front of a succession of wave-fronts travelling along this wire that is my brain. Another may be just behind me, and another behind it, so that a fraction of a second in what I

consider my past may be another wave front of awareness experiencing everything I have experienced. Another may be a fraction of a second in what I regard as the future. To generalize that viewpoint, *I* may be just one of a very large number of awareness-fronts, traveling the same channel.

Let's pause in this dizzy flight for a moment and go back to conventional ideas. Modern physics rather prides itself on having divorced itself from the absolutism of Newton. No absolute motion, no absolute space. Everything is relative. No Euclidean lines, no Euclidean space.

In all this break-away from absolutism one subtle absolute has remained, and it is a very significant one. Most significant. It is still taken for granted that the present instant is the present instant throughout all space. *Right this instant* is a something that has a definitely Euclidean quality.

Let's compare *this instant* here on Earth with the present on Polaris. Light is leaving Polaris right now. Fifty years from now it will reach the Earth.

Right now there is a galaxy fifty thousand light-years from us, and the light it is sending out at this instant will reach the Earth fifty thousand years from now.

Do you see the basic assumption inherent in that—that the present is a Euclidean slice of hyperspace, or space-time? It may not conform to fact. If you were to discover some

way to transfer your awareness to Polaris in this present instant you might find yourself in a present ahead of or behind our present on Earth. Then, if you were to send a radio signal to Earth, it would arrive here in less than or more than fifty years, and we would have to choose between the theories of light and radiant energy taking fifty years to come from Polaris, the present on Polaris being the same as the present here.

That basic assumption about the Euclidean quality of the present seems the only sensible one merely because we haven't thought much about it. One basic assumption about reality is that it exists only in the present, and that present exists simultaneously throughout all reality. We assume the past does not exist, and the future doesn't exist.

There may be laws affecting the behavior of that awareness-front which we haven't touched. Laws that give us inklings into what we call extra-temporal perception. Laws of induction of this type of energy giving us effects we call extrasensory perception.

It *seems* we are born, grow up, die, and get buried in a cemetery. It may be the other way around. Or it may be neither, but only seem one or the other, depending on which direction in hyperspace our individual awareness-front travels.

Now, after all this build-up (which has no doubt lost me two thirds of those who started to read this), are there any significant conclusions that are worth making? I think so. They are in a way quite nebulous, and are of value, perhaps, only in introducing you to a viewpoint.

The first conclusion we can draw is that the *present* may not exist at all in what we call physical reality.

The corollary of that would naturally be that the *present* is a property of awareness, and may be peculiar to the human mind, existing nowhere else. Further, it may be uniquely a property of only my mind—a defect in it, limiting it to successive slices of three dimensions in the four-dimensional continuum.

If the present is a property of awareness, then it may be *ignorance* of that property that keeps us confined to the present as it flows through hyper-reality. Extratemporal perception implies that explicitly.

The second conclusion we can draw is that, if the present is a property of awareness instead of physical reality, then awareness is qualitatively different from physical reality, possessing different and unique properties. We then have an entering wedge into the study of theories espoused by religions. Immortality independent of the physical form, reincarnation, and so on.

It's interestin'. What got me to thinking along those lines is that Mari and I are spending the summer at Big Bear Lake, seven thousand feet up from San Bernardino, California. Outside my window are giant pine trees, old when I was born. In my mind's eye I can look down below at San Bernardino and, in the near distance, Los Angeles. When I look into the sky at night the stars seem much nearer—and they are over a mile nearer.

I have a feeling that we are completely blind to the obvious. We are conditioned to overlook it, and to see only that which builds from things we already know. Perhaps a subtle shift of viewpoint might unfold things with startling abruptness, and overnight we might step over the threshold into that which we at times suspect, but cannot see.

* * *

I think the secret of the continued success of stf fandom is because it is a natural place to find self-expression and an audience for that self-expression.

Another thing, it is one of the few ways of making real friends outside your own neighborhood. I don't know of any other way by which you can, if you care to, get acquainted with interesting people in every state in the union, and even other countries. Fans are great letter-writers.

* * *

SCIENCE-FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; Roy Squires, 1745 Kenneth Rd., Glendale 1, Calif. This is a fanzine that grows on you. I'm beginning to think it the best one in the field. It has advertising—lots of it, confined to books and back-number magazines in the science-fiction and fantasy field. It has a very large circulation.

But somehow Mr. Squires manages to get articles that are far better than the average, even the average in the professional magazines. Arthur J. Cox's article, "Deus Ex Machina", a study of A. E. Van Vogt, is such an article. It studies Van Vogt in relation to his writings, and his writings in relation to him, in a way that is fascinating. Every sentence of the article shows evidence of being carefully thought out. And for me it provided an insight into myself.

Book reviews in this fanzine aren't just something to fill space. The *Advertiser* is one of the few magazines where a book review invariably adds something to the book reviewed besides the reviewer's complimentary or otherwise remarks about the book.

Over and above these things, Roy Squires manages to get artwork that *Amazing Stories* itself would be most happy to have. And the photo-offset method of reproduction brings it out to best advantage.

I seldom say this about any fanzine, but if you want just one fanzine, this is the one to get.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; James V. Taurasi, editor, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, New York. The newszine with the largest circulation and the best coverage of stf news. Photo-offset, it can bring you such things as reproductions of the

covers of magazines to appear on the stands in the near future. Arthur J. Cox conducts the "Cosmic Reporter", which brings you the odds and ends of current happenings. "Fantasy Forecasts" tells you what the contents of next month's magazines will be. One of the most valuable services of F-T is "Slick Stf", by Don Ford, which informs you which magazines outside the stf field, are currently running a stf story or an article of interest to fans.

Lester Mayer, Jr., reports regularly on the films and t.v. programs that bring stf to you. And of course there are lots of news items about happenings in fandom itself.

Subscribers to F-T keep informed on everything that is going on.

* * *

PEON: 10c; "published irregularly but at least four times a year" by Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Connecticut. A mimeographed fanzine by an expert mimeographer, Charles Lee Riddle, a Navy man, began his zine when he was stationed in Hawaii. He publishes it to make friends, and he has friends all over the world. It's a sort of a family project. His wife and children are in on it too.

His editorial this time discusses hoaxes, and there have been several in the history of fandom. The most recent one is the "news" that a well known stf fan in Ireland is dead. Last year there was a similar rumor that Bob Tucker had died. If this keeps up it will be impossible to make any one believe anyone has died until years after it happens.

Dave Mason discusses politics and fandom in "The Robot and the Komisar". His contention seems to be that fandom's non-political stand is itself a political stand.

Charles seems to have snagged an article about *Galaxy* by its editor, Horace Gold. It's an interesting article, discussing most of the problems of publishing.

"Fantastuff" by Terry Carr is a highly entertaining department that debunks a lot of bunk in the fan and pro fields. I hope it keeps up as a regular feature of *Peon*.

There's lots more, but that's enough to give you an idea of *Peon's* contents. A good generalzine, representative of fandom, and enjoyable to read.

* * *

FAN-FARE: 15c; Editor, W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, N.Y.; Associate: Robert E. Briney; Onlooker: Al Leverenz. That's a new official designation.

Some real fan fiction... "Dread Huntress", by Andrew Duane. "Who—What—was this strange silver woman who trod the misty night?" The second story has an idea I might swipe for a story myself. "To Be a God", by Walt Klein. "One sought gold, jewels...the other sought a

different kind of treasure:—for the rock had been a God!" Third story has a Campbellish title, "Aftermath From Angle Two", by Al Leverenz, the official Onlooker of the editorial staff. The blurb for this one is, "Sometimes you can't write a blurb..." And after reading it I agree with him. It's a strange mood piece. The fourth story is "Return From Terror", by James Warren. "He came to them in the night, alone, clad in strangeness, shrouded in mystery, lost in the depths of a greater darkness..."

Ganley is tops as a blurb writer.

There are also five poems and quite a few articles. You get your fifteen cents' worth and more, and if you are new to fandom this is a zine that will show you what real fan publishing is.

* * *

FANTASTIC WORLDS: 25c; Ed Ludwig, 1942 Telegraph Ave., Stockton, Calif. A new fanzine that will shoot to the top of the heap in short order if Ed can keep it up. Lithographed, it has top names on its contents page. Ed plans to make it something the best writers of fan fiction will be proud to have their works appear in. And pro writers too! Ed has things by Kris Neville, William F. Temple, Clark Ashton Smith, Weaver Wright, and Manly Banister, and I'm sure that after a few more pros see how terrific this zine is they will want their shorter works in it too!

This is a first issue, and if the zine is to survive it must have plenty of subscribers fast, so don't delay in sending your quarter for the first issue.

* * *

TLMA: 25c; "The Little Monster of America"; Lynn A. Hickman, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, N.C. The Little Monsters is now one of the largest fan groups in the U.S., and still growing.

This issue contains three stories, by Ken Bzale, Battell Loomis, and Alex Griffith. Nicest item in the zine is Lynn's picture of himself and his new bride. He got hitched June first to Carole Hustwick of Napoleon, Ohio. Congratulations, Lynn.

There's a big letter department in TLMA, and lots doing. I'm an honorary Monster myself, and proud to be one.

* * *

OOPSLA: 10c; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City, 16, Utah. Mimeographed with lots of artwork. Twenty-six pages that contain a good representation of every type of fan production.

Shelby Vick's "Dear Alice" still tops

the issue. It's a sort of running fairy tale, very entertaining, with lots of inuendos and stuff.

Mack Reynolds has an article, "I Remember This Story", which concerns a conversation he and Fred Brown had driving to Taos one day last year.

(Mari informs me the mail truck starts down the mountain in another half hour from the post office, so I'll have to cut this and the next review short if I'm to get this mailed in time for it to get in the next *Amazing Stories*.)

* * *

ETRON: bimonthly; 25c; Chuck Taylor, 1521 Mars, Lakewood, Ohio. A first issue, fifty pages. I'll bet Chuck can't keep it up. It would break a rich man to put out so much for so little.

Four stories, seven articles, and several departments. The articles on "H Bomb Theory", by Bob Evans, Jr., is worth the price alone. But so is each of the stories.

* * *

This country is achingly beautiful. Here, you can get away from all the world shaking crisis that break, every hour, in the papers. The more you contemplate nature's manifestations, the more baffled you become by the frantic actions of the bipeds—the tailored and neck-tied variety, that is. Here under the sky, with the trees and the vastness, you get a feeling that there is definitely a plan to all this. A plan that will work out; that if we want to go along with it, and benefit in the end, that's fine with the Master Planner. If we want to beat our own brains out, though, and be extinct before the payoff—maybe that's all right too.

All for this month. Outside my window I can hear the wind blowing through the pines. Not far away is the lake—one of those artificial lakes created by the State of California to preserve its water supply. No earthquakes today—and that's news, with all the quakes we've been having in southern California lately.

—ROG PHILLIPS

THE READER'S FORUM



PAGING ELLIOT

Gentlemen:

A few months ago, in AMAZING, I saw a letter from a man by the name of Elliott Rockmore, or Rockland, something like that. He wanted clippings about flying saucers, and I sent him some. He wrote and acknowledged them and I have sent him several more lots. Now I have another batch for him and I cannot find his address. I had it in my desk, but it must have been accidentally destroyed. I have looked through my back copies of AMAZING, but can not find it. Do you happen to know this man and his address? If not, will you please print this letter and maybe he will see it. I enjoy your magazine greatly—all of it, except the letters that find fault with you. Keep up the good work.

All the best to you.

Ivy May Hardman
Mannville, Florida

FROM ONE OF UNCLE SAM'S BEST

Dear Mr. Browne:

Have read sf for many years but have never joined any fan organizations for the simple reason that I never knew where I would be tomorrow. What I would like to find out is this. Is there any club for transients like me? If so, how does one go about contacting them and becoming a member in good standing? I rarely get back stateside and when I do it is only for short periods of time. I would also like to know if there are any ways for a man in service to obtain a steady supply of sf magazines. Out of about 108 months' service in the Army, 79 of it is in the Orient. That has proved to be quite a problem in sf logistics. Subscriptions have proved to be erratic because of the constant moving around I have done. Then too, are there any fan organizations that are interested in carrying on a sf pen-pal acquaintanceship? I have met soldiers like myself who are interested in sf and we carried on some lively discussions but eventually we would be separated by the needs of the service and that ended that. Would be grateful for any info you may be able to give me.

Sergeant Poticher
RA 33505226
568th Med. Amb. Co. (SEP)
APO 301 c/o Post Master
San Francisco, California

James V. Taurasi, editor of Fantasy-Times—137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, New York, sponsors a very worthy organization called Fan-Vets. Through this medium, he distributes science fiction magazines to men in the armed services—and women too, no doubt. Why don't you get in touch with Mr. Taurasi and ask to be put on his list. As to your request for correspondents—maybe this letter will help.

—Ed.

MAN WITH A GRIPE

Dear Mr. Browne:

None of this noise about "first letter" stuff for me.

I gotta kick. The last few issues of AS have been in a class all to themselves, not bad but not sf.

What I refer to is the fact that in the past few issues you have put in material that is far from any sf that I have ever read, and in a definite fantasy line.

Now I don't say that I don't like fantasy, but it has no place in AS. The place for it is in FANTASTIC, that new little jewel of the Z-D Company.

The Rog Phillips yarn, "Black Angels...etc." was good, as one has come to expect from Rog. It was perfect for the next FANTASTIC, but not sf.

"Master of the Universe" is very good and well written, not to mention interesting. If you see the author—oh, I beg your pardon, he isn't born yet (?????), I was going to say congratulate him for me.

Since you are in such close contact with the future, have this author mail me a letter with a 20?? A.D. postmark on it, I collect stamps.

I would like to correspond with fans, fanzine editors, and anyone who reads the fabulous field of sf.

Jim Rutherford
933 West Latham
Phoenix, Arizona

This might be a good place to mention that—due to technical difficulties—no installment of MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE appears in this issue.

—Ed.

A VOICE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have been reading AS since 1935 and it still remains my first love as regards science fiction. I hesitate to give an opinion about the progress of the magazine through the years, as we here in South Africa have to take what we can get and be satisfied.

Suffice it to say that many pleasant hours of my life have been spent with AS.

I have just finished reading the August issue and found it excellent, with the exception of the "Winged Peril" by Robert Moore Williams, which I found very mediocre.

Fans in S. A. are few and far apart. We have also had and are still having a hard time procuring science-fiction mags as a result of control of imports from dollar-countries. At long last I succeeded in renewing my AS subscription via England. So my AS travels approximately 11,000 miles before it reaches me!

My collection of earlier issues (1933 to 1945) was lost, but I have a complete set of AS from June 1946 to September 1951. Then I missed six issues (October 1951 to March 1952) and after that I am up to date. I would like to appeal to other readers to help me procure the missing six listed above. It is impossible for us in South Africa to buy anything in the U. S. A., but I am willing to send South African magazines (not science-fiction, as there aren't any!) or stamps, etc., in return.

Lastly, I would like to appeal to the circulation director in person to keep on sending my AS so that I can keep my collection complete—he can be sure that the subscription fee will reach him some time or other. Please just let me know in advance when it should be renewed.

Best wishes for the future—long live AS!

Paul Haupt
Post Office Box 1
Colesberg, South Africa

NOT ENOUGH LETTERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Run and hide behind your stack of unread manuscripts, Howard Browne, I'm mad at you! I haven't read the stories in the October issue yet, I think they will be okay, but those illos! Did you give all your money to Leinster for that story he wrote, and then not have enough left to buy just one illo from Finlay?

The only other beef I have is that the letter-column and the Club House aren't long enough. Couldn't you take out a few of those articles and give these two features a little more space?

Otherwise I like your magazine very much. I think AMAZING is one of the best in the field, and has a variety of stories to suit every taste. I like your editorials too, at least I don't have to consult a dictionary to read them, like I do with one editor of an sf mag.

I have only one reason for wanting this letter published, and here it is. Are there any fans in my home province of Nova Scotia? How about dropping me a line? In fact I would like to hear from fans anywhere, and I promise to answer all letters.

Best wishes,

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Maybe the next fan club of record will originate in Nova Scotia. —Ed.

AMAZING STILL THE BEST

Dear Mr. Browne:

Without any ado I shall get right to the point. The point is the September issue of AMAZING STORIES—truly wonderful in all respects. Certainly Hugo Gernsback should be proud of his baby, for AMAZING is still the best of science-fiction mags now as it was when he was in charge.

Now for a few general comments on your magazine. First, AMAZING rates because of its short and interesting extra features. It rates for its legitimate sf and its curiosity-rousing illustrations. I do not favor serials but put up with them. (If I want a serial I'll buy a book.) Rog Phillips' editorials add spice to the mag and should be continued. It seems to me that the variety offered by AMAZING STO-

RIES makes it the first of the firsts.

Now for the September issue in particular. The best story by far, a real classic in my opinion, was Rog Phillips' "Adam's First Wife". In comparison the other stories were rather mediocre, but, as sf goes, none of them can be slighted. It's just that Phillips' story was so superb. Fairman's novel was a little too detectivish for me. I wondered whether the science in science fiction was going to enter in at all. I was not disappointed, but it was a long wait.

All in all, your September mag was wonderful, as are all issues of AMAZING. For this reason I felt that it was about time for me to register my vote of thanks.

Bonita Berka
1417 Vine Street
Waterloo, Iowa

HOLD THAT DINOSAUR!

Dear Sir:

Have been reading your mags, FA and AS, and recently noticed a listing of fanzines and their editors. I wonder if you could possibly send me a listing of those mags which are being published in Brooklyn and Manhattan?

What ever happened to those old "Lefty Feep" stories? I think they would be a relief after some of the stories printed lately. Science-fiction stories seem to have become glorified who-dunnits.

Got to sign off before my wife comes back! She doesn't like the sound of a typewriter. It reminds her of the sounds of her youth. She told me once that a dinosaur gritted its teeth right near the tree where she was sleeping.

Danny Gayle
2212 East 3rd Street
Brooklyn 23, New York

A RUN-DOWN ON THE ISSUE

Dear Editor:

I received the October issue of AMAZING STORIES a couple of weeks ago, and have just finished reading it. So here's my opinion about the material.

"Shadow on the Moon" was the only top story in this issue. "The Innkeeper of Mars" comes next. A good story. Then comes "He Played with Dolls", which wasn't too bad, but the plot is old. "Deadly Dust" is next, no comment on that one. "The Blessed Assassins" was interesting reading. "Idiot Command" I liked. And finally, "Master of the Universe". I can't bring myself to read this stuff. Seems like a lot of junk to me. Hummmmm! Do I hear other fans disagreeing?

When is AS going to get some more time travel stories?

I'd be glad to hear from other fans if they would care to write to me.

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SPACE WAR

By John Weston

CONSIDERABLE speculation in science-fiction has been devoted to the concept of space warfare. Generally speaking, the majority of this guessing has concentrated on a period so far in the future that technology bears little resemblance to what we know today. Under those conditions, the "proton guns", the "devastating rays", and all the other paraphernalia of an incredible technical age become believable and open to no question.

But, from a realistic standpoint, what of military operations in space in the more recognizable future, the future only decades away? Here, an extrapolation of modern technical capabilities is reasonable, and the warfare of s-f seems highly improbable. Let's examine the situation.

It is perfectly clear that, within the next few decades, the Western world, led by the United States, is going to put up a space station around the Earth, probably several, is going to land on the Moon and probably Mars and Venus, and in general is going to make space travel a reality, limited only by certain technical considerations. It is also highly likely that this same procedure will be duplicated more or less by the inimical powers behind the Iron Curtain. Neglecting the obvious use of the space stations for bombing cities on Earth, what would a "space war" be like?

Dismiss from your mind the picture of rocket ships flashing in toward each other, spitting rays and weird projectiles! Fuel will still be too precious, speeds too great, and distances too fantastic for such shenanigans. Rather, warfare would be overt, in the possibility of one vessel's overtaking another and destroying it by the use of a simple bazooka, recoilless artillery piece, or simply-fashioned bomb-torpedo. This too would be difficult, since it is a certainty that radar apparatus would be possessed by both combatants.

Probably the only direct warfare that could be carried on in space, under these circumstances, is the destruction of space stations, the raiding of possible Moon bases and similar operations against fixed targets.

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By

SID OVERMAN

THE TRANSMISSION of facsimile images, photographs, printed matter, etc. is an important application of electronics. The evolution of sending messages from the old telegraph key to the modern teletypewriter is a fascinating story being continually changed by new technical innovations. The problem is speed, ever more speed. More words per minute have to go through.

Facsimile transmission is a technical marvel which has been lost sight of in the popular eye because of television, but it has a great and growing utility. Many are familiar with the facsimile transmission of photographs so widely used by newspapers. Here the photograph to be sent is fastened to a rotating drum revolving slowly while a pinpoint photo-electric cell scans it, changes its surface into electrical pulses which are sent over an ordinary radio transmitter and reproduced at the other end by the inverse process, using there a pinpoint beam of light. The system is fine but slow.

In the new "High speed Fax" method the printed matter is again fastened to a drum, but this time rotated at a high speed. A super-sensitive cell does the scanning, through a beam of light penetrating the very paper on the drum. On the other end, a beam of light is not used. Instead, the electrical pulses pass directly through the paper specially sensitized for the purpose. The result is, that close to three thousand words per minute can be sent! Letters, printed matter and drawings can be transmitted, but photographs are out because their detail is too great. Which is perfectly okay with the operators. The prime objective is to get words across in bunches and quantity—more than a hundred square inches per minute can be sent.

All of this is part of the general picture of the future. "Words, words, words"—by the millions are poured into transmitters and wires. Our civilization is built on easy communication and in spite of the old saw to the contrary, words tell more than pictures very often. The ultimate in word transmission, of course, will eventually be a variation of television scanning methods, but these are to be worked out yet so as to get the maximum transmission. It won't be too long before the clicking of the teletypewriter becomes as obsolete as the pounding of the telegraph key!

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ROBOT'S REVENGE

By LAWRENCE
CHANDLER

REGARDING LUNA...

By HOWARD EISEN

FOR A LONG time science has been telling us that to regard the Moon as having any influence upon human affairs is simply to carry over an antiquated superstition. The hypothetical "Moon madness" and the seasonal Lunar variations of crops were to be thought sheer nonsense. Strangely enough, the latest evidence, while by no means confirming these time-honored theories, does suggest that the Moon has some influence over human beings, over plants, over animals—almost everything.

Analytically, the whole thing is still in a highly tentative stage, with only the suggestive evidence available, but that is enough to cause one to think. University scientists are aware that all living things have a certain measurable electrical potential—this has been known for a long time, and it is reasonable in the light of the fact that life seems essentially electrical in nature. Physiologists have conducted certain tests which have demonstrated the existence of this D.C. potential. One scientist embedded electrodes some distance apart in the trunk of a tree and then connected the leads to a recording apparatus. The voltage produced by the tree remained fairly constant except during exposure to strong Lunar light! Immediately the scientist tried to determine a correlation between things such as air pressure, humidity, magnetism, and so on, which could easily account for the increased voltage. But no luck. Apparently, in some obscure way, the Moon was affecting the tree. Subsequent observations have confirmed this. In addition, it is known that the Moon affects radio waves, influences the tides, and in general makes itself known by some changed reaction in many varieties of phenomena.

So it seems that what was once merely a superstition has now become a scientific fact. The reasons may be different, but the fact is the same. Luna is not up in the sky just to look at! Somehow it sends down its tentacles of light to toy with human conditions. "Moonstruck" is more than a word!

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(continued from second cover)

and write—poetry. Other hobbies are reading, gardening and beer-drinking. In November 1938 I married Beverly Stiles, and our daughter, Lail, was born in February 1949. Beverly, Lail and I all work in a midly chaotic jumble, with my drafting table near the front door.

BONE KNITTING

With Needles

By CHARLES RECOUR

MEDICAL science progresses in a heart-breakingly slow fashion in spite of all the glowing accounts written about it. With all the wonder-drugs and magic healing-potions which the laboratories seem to discover in ever-increasing quantities, basic healing techniques don't really seem to change much. But every now and then, a cheering advance is made. One of the most encouraging is the case of the "bone-knitter."

Everyone is familiar with the healing of broken bones. It usually involves immobilizing the patient in a huge plaster-of-Paris cast and letting time and nature do the healing. Generally in the case of a severe leg fracture the time may be more than a year before the leg is completely knit. Army surgeons in World War II, however, discovered and practiced a new technique which has now been adopted after much testing. A metal rod is simply slipped into the channel of the bones where it supports them—and within a few weeks the patient is up and walking! No casts, no mess—simplicity itself. In other words the metal rod serves as a temporary bone until the real one knits together.

As effective as this treatment is, what causes everyone to marvel is that it is so obvious! Why has it taken this long for actual use when it would strike the most untutored as the obvious thing to do? The answer may lie partially in the inertia of the medical mind and partially in the fact that medical men are rarely mechanics. Perhaps if medical men were to take more mechanical training they might apply the elementary principles of carpentry and metal working to surgical processes with surprisingly good results—as in this specific case.

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Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

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